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Swiss Review

The magazine
for the Swiss Abroad



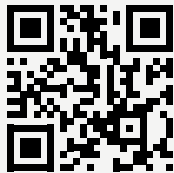
**On thin ice – taking scientific readings on
Switzerland's disappearing glaciers**

**Referendum looms on funding the
13th state pension payment**

**Beavers – nature's wetland engineers
helping to increase biodiversity**

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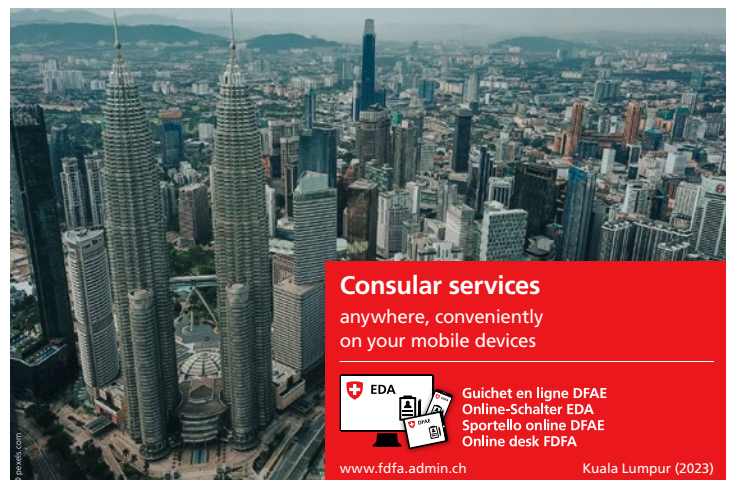


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Photo: Alain Amherd

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Time is running out for Switzerland's magnificent glaciers

By the time you hold this edition of “Swiss Review”, or read it online, Switzerland's exceptionally hot, dry summer will be in the past. An extreme summer of record temperatures, depleted groundwater levels, animal feed shortages, tinder-dry forests, and increased hospital admissions caused by the heat. Our glaciers also suffered badly, although these masses of ice have been melting for quite some time already. Since 2000, Switzerland's 1,400 or so glaciers have diminished in volume by almost 40 per cent. As global warming continues unabated, they are set to melt even faster.

What is it like up there on the ice? How do the scientists work out how quickly and by how much the glaciers are melting? And what would it mean if these stunning natural wonders vanished completely? Glaciers define the Swiss Alps. They act as reservoirs and are popular tourist magnets of cultural value.

“Swiss Review” visited the mountains to find out. Our editor and our photographer put on their crampons and observed as two scientists from ETH Zurich took readings on the Scex Rouge glacier in the Vaud Alps (see page 4). Their findings are sobering, as we explain in our lead article. But a prominent Swiss glaciologist tells us he has not lost all hope.

Thanks to the blistering summer, this year's National Day celebrations were relatively muted. Fireworks were banned almost everywhere because of the risk of fires. This ban could become permanent – if the electorate endorses a popular initiative seeking to restrict their use across Switzerland. The debate ahead of the 29 November vote has polarised opinion, not least within our editorial team (see page 10).

Three other items will appear on the ballot sheet, including the referendum on a proposed VAT hike to fund the 13th state pension payment, which was approved by voters in 2024 and will be made to all eligible recipients at the end of 2026. Parliament's decision to increase VAT was preceded by much political wrangling. We look back at this debate and explain the formalities of the 13th payment to all Swiss Abroad.

State pension; National Day fireworks; glaciers – Switzerland in a nutshell. We all have some say on these issues. And not just at the ballot box.

ON BEHALF OF THE EDITORIAL TEAM: NEMA BLIGGENSTORFER

Cover photo: Glaciologist Janosch Beer measures how much ice has melted on the Scex Rouge glacier at the end of July 2026. The glacier reached up to the top of the pole a year earlier. It is likely to disappear completely within 20 to 30 years. Photo: Marco Zanoni

“Swiss Review”, the information magazine for the “Fifth Switzerland”, is published by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad

**Swiss
Community**

Swiss glaciers – melting in record time



Alpine glaciers were severely affected in the scorching summer of 2026. Their dramatic retreat is one of the most visually striking symptoms of climate change. If temperatures continue to rise unchecked, glaciers could disappear entirely by the end of the century. “Swiss Review” accompanied two scientists on an expedition to assess the ice loss.

ETH Zurich scientists Janosch Beer and Ariana David assessing ice loss on the Scex Rouge glacier, where the cantons of Vaud and Valais meet.
Photo: Marco Zanoni

THEODORA PETER

We disembark at the Glacier 3000 station that straddles the cantons of Vaud and Valais, having ascended by cable car from the Col du Pillon. It is the last Monday of July, and we are now almost 3,000 metres above sea level. From this lofty perch, we can make out the highest peaks in the Alps. The tip of the Matterhorn has been dusted with fresh snow, as thunderstorms brought some showers the previous day. Otherwise, the precipitation already seems to have evaporated. This is a summer of extreme drought – and the next heatwave is on its way. Temperature records have been broken in many places around Switzerland.

It is a fairly cool 10 degrees Celsius up here. Cloud formations drift across the sky. A high plateau stretches out before us, comprising the relatively flat Scex Rouge and Zanfleuron glaciers. These two ice masses were still connected to each other until a few years ago. They have been separated since 2022 by bare rock that emerged due to intense melting – a consequence of human-driven climate change. Ten years ago, this spot was still buried under 15 metres of ice. Now the rocky spine of the Col de Zanfleuron protrudes ever more prominently above the two shrinking glaciers.

The continuous sound of splashing

“Swiss Review” is out in the field with 31-year-old glaciologist and ETH Zurich doctoral student Janosch Beer as he measures surface melting and takes ice temperature readings on the Scex Rouge. Colleague Ariana David is with him, assisting with the work. We take the chair lift that leads 200 metres down to the glacier in summer, where tourists can then walk along a safe, marked trail called the Glacier Walk. Next to the lift lie long piles of snow covered in white tarpaulin. Many mountain resorts “farm” snow deposits

like these to preserve snow from the previous winter for the following ski season.

On reaching the edge of the bare glacier, we fasten crampons onto our hiking boots. These additions will help us keep our balance on the slippery ground. There are rivulets and small streams everywhere along the slightly downward incline. We can hear the continuous sound of splashing. Beer has been coming here every summer for several years. “I have never seen the glacier so wet,” he says. Meltwater has collected at the lowest point to form a small lake, the contents of which cascade over the precipice.

Situated more or less halfway across the glacier is an aluminium pole that can be seen from a good distance. The glaciologists are using it to measure how much ice has been lost. It is called an ablation stake. A year ago, Beer inserted it four metres deep into the glacier. The pole’s upper end now sticks out almost three metres above the ice. “And summer isn’t over yet.” A second measurement at the lower end of the

glacier completes the data: some 2.4 to 2.9 metres of pure ice have melted this season on the surface of the Scex Rouge glacier. According to Beer, this corresponds to readings from previous years, which were classed as high to extreme.

Without doubt, the glacier’s days are numbered. Still 40 or so metres deep, the Scex Rouge is likely to disappear within 20 to 30 years. This outcome is inevitable, because the glacier is unable to retreat to a higher area where snow would also fall in summer, allowing new glacier ice to form.

Too much water

Besides measuring the thickness of the ice, Beer is looking at the ice temperature at various depths. At the start of his research project, he installed sensors within the glacier that are connected to the surface via a long cable. Beer hooks up his laptop to the cable and downloads the various readings in no time. One of the things he is investigating as part of

A chair lift takes visitors down from the Glacier 3000 station to the Scex Rouge (left) and the Zanfleuron (right) – two glaciers that were connected to each other until 2022. On the ground are long piles of leftover winter snow, kept under white tarpaulin for the next ski season.

Photo: Marco Zanoni





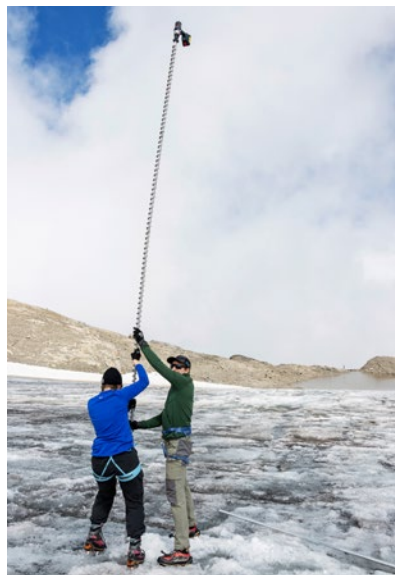
Glaciologist Janosch Beer downloads temperature data onto his laptop. The cable is connected to sensors that he inserted deep into the ice a few years ago.

Photo: Marco Zanoni

his doctoral thesis is how a lack of snow cover affects temperatures inside the glacier. The purpose of his findings is to help safeguard against the impact of natural events. The Blatten disaster in 2025 showed just how devastating the consequences of collapsing glaciers can be for villages below (see pages 16 and 17 as well as “Swiss Review” 4/2025).

As soon as all the readings are complete, Beer takes out a power drill from his rucksack. The aluminium poles need to be pushed four metres deep into the glacier again, so he needs to drill new holes into the ice. Beer aborts his first drilling attempt after reaching a depth of one metre – too much water is pushing up from underneath. “This has never happened to me before,” the researcher says. After trying at a couple of other spots, he finally completes the job. His work on the Scex Rouge is finished for this year.

Beer spends the following days in Valais, taking more readings. The glaciologist emails us a week later, telling us that the ice was melting intensely wherever he went. “Some poles were protruding over three metres above the ice. We were able to take readings just in time. The ice around other poles had melted completely. These readings were lost.” He also noticed how much exposed ice was visible at



The researchers pull the drill rod from a freshly drilled hole. They will then re-insert the pole (lying on the ice to the right) four metres deep into the glacier.

Photo: Marco Zanoni

altitudes over 4,000 metres. “Those parts used to be covered in snow all year round.”

One extreme year after another

All data on glacier volumes is fed to the Glacier Monitoring in Switzerland network, known as GLAMOS, which monitors 176 glaciers. Every September, at the end of the hydrological year, GLAMOS publishes overall readings from a number of key glaciers. These were not yet available at the time of our editorial deadline.

But 2026 already looked like an extreme year based on early read-

ings in July, says GLAMOS director Matthias Huss. “Switzerland’s glaciers are in a very, very poor state,” the 46-year-old glaciologist confirms in a video call. Glaciers have been retreating continually since 1990, but the melting had again accelerated considerably in recent years, he said. The real tipping point was 2022, when records tumbled. “It has been one extreme year after another since then.”

Apart from the hot temperatures, this year’s massive glacial melt is down to a lack of winter snow. “If there is enough snowfall in winter, this can protect the ice well into summer.” However, melted areas of glacier expose darker surfaces that absorb the sunlight and warm up. “This turbocharges the melting process.” Sahara dust blowing into the Alps accentuates this effect.

Yet not even snowy winters are enough to stop the decline. Take 2024, for example, when Huss measured up to five metres of new snow covering the glaciers 3,000 metres

Natural reservoirs in danger

The disappearance of glacier ice has major implications for water security. “There is a reason why the Alps are known as the water tower of Europe,” says glaciologist Matthias Huss. Major rivers like the Rhine, Rhône and Po begin there, fed in part by snowmelt and glacial melt. “The glaciers are like natural reservoirs; they help to keep water flowing, particularly when it is hot and dry.” People in Alpine valleys have taken advantage of glaciers for centuries, building channels to funnel meltwater towards their dry pastures and fields. Some of these ancient irrigation canals are still in use in Valais, where they are referred to as “bisses” in French and “Suonen” in German.

Hydropower generation is also likely to be affected in the long term as glaciers shrink, Huss says. Melting glaciers are currently helping to replenish reservoirs. “But the effect will diminish once these natural reservoirs have been drained.”

(TP)

“Seeing them disappear
before our eyes, we
realise what is at stake.”

Matthias Huss, glaciologist

The value of beauty

Switzerland's national identity is intertwined with the Alps and their glaciers. The Swiss national anthem even refers to the mountains glowing bright with splendour in the red morning skies. But what if the Alps were one day reduced to nothing but desolate grey rocks and scree? Author Marcel Hänggi, who has covered the climate crisis as a journalist for over 20 years, addresses this question in his recently published book “Das Schöne, das verloren geht” (When beauty is lost). Driven by “grief at the devastation that humans have caused”, Hänggi looks at what we lose by destroying the environment, and why beauty hardly plays any role in the political and scientific debate. Can beauty be a reliable basis for making decisions? “Difficult to say,” he concedes. Yet the beauty of nature is relevant, “because we are quite obviously unable to protect the environment when we only consider the environment's instrumental value.” In his wide-ranging essay, Hänggi moves the discussion beyond the notion of nature being something that is merely useful. “Without beauty, life is no longer deserving of its name.” (TP)

DAS SCHÖNE, DAS VERLOREN GEHT.
MARCEL HÄNGGI. RÖPUNKTVERLAG, 2026

up. “I remember thinking it would be impossible for the snow to melt completely by autumn.” Two hot summer months later, and the snow had gone. “Ultimately, summer is the key factor causing glacial melt.”

The big glaciers are also melting

Extreme years have a particularly devastating impact on small glaciers, causing them to disintegrate into smaller sections or disappear completely. Huss has himself witnessed the gradual disappearance of the Pizol glacier in the canton of St Gallen, which he has visited around 50 times in the last 20 years to take readings. “After 2022, all that was left was a rolling plateau of rocks and scree.”

Switzerland's biggest Alpine glaciers – the Aletsch Glacier in the Jun-

gfrau region, and the Gorner Glacier near the Monte Rosa massif – suffer a moderate annual loss in thickness of around two metres, barely apparent to the naked eye. Both glaciers are hundreds of metres deep. “But if you stand in front of one of the glacier tongues, you notice the difference from one year to the next,” says Huss. The front of the Rhône Glacier

“Seeing glaciers disappear before our eyes, we realise what is at stake,” says glaciologist Matthias Huss, head of the Glacier Monitoring in Switzerland network, known as GLAMOS. Photo: Keystone

is a prime example. “The ice there has retreated a long way back, leaving a lake where it has melted.”

According to Huss, the survival of high-lying glaciers depends on “whether the world turns the tide on climate change”. If we can limit global warming to 1.5°C, “then these glaciers can retreat to higher altitudes”. But this scenario is becoming increasingly unlikely. “We are currently on course for a 2.7°C increase in global temperatures. Climate projections even show the Alps getting warmer by 4°C.” If recent extreme years become the default, “it is quite possible that the ice will disappear completely even at altitudes above 4,000 metres by the end of the century.”

The outlook is depressing, but the glaciologist is undeterred. In fact, Huss believes documenting the great



Climate change has also taken its toll on big glaciers. The Rhône Glacier is retreating further and further, leaving a lake where the ice has melted. Photo: Keystone

changes in the Alps is an opportunity. “We can harness the evocative force of glaciers to illustrate climate change.” Glaciers resonate with many people, be it due to childhood memories or holidays spent in the mountains. “Seeing them disappear before our eyes, we realise what is at stake.”

Glacier Monitoring in Switzerland (GLAMOS)
www.glamos.ch

More glacier photos:
www.revue.link/ice



Referendum looms on VAT hike to fund the state pension system

Following heated debate, parliament has decided to increase VAT to 8.5 percent as a means of partially funding the 13th state pension payment without the working population having to pick up the tab directly. Voters will now be asked for their opinion on 29 November 2026.



EVELINE RUTZ

December will see the first 13th state pension (OASI) payments being made to all eligible recipients in Switzerland and abroad. The total outlay will be around 4.2 billion Swiss francs, but demographic changes mean this sum will likely rise to 5.4 billion francs by 2040. The number of pensioners increases every year. At the end of 2025, 2,635,200 people – one third of whom live abroad – were receiving OASI benefits. The figure is likely to be about three million in 10 years' time. Costs will also increase, because pensions are regularly adjusted in line with inflation and wages.

Yet it is still unclear how the increased pension payments will be

Around 2.6 million people were receiving OASI benefits at the end of 2025. The figure is likely to be 3 million in 10 years' time.

funded. The trade unions may have scored an historic victory at the polls in 2024 with their idea of a 13th state pension payment (see "Swiss Review" 3/2024), but they never addressed the financial side. Unsurprisingly, subsequent debates in parliament have been protracted and heated.

How to cover the expense? Increase pension contributions? Raise taxes? Redistribute revenue? Whatever the answer, parliamentarians from all parties wanted the result of the 2024 vote to be implemented quickly. Voters treating themselves to an additional OASI payment now had to pay for it, noted conservative politicians dryly. As the Centre Party National Councillor Thomas Rechsteiner put it: "Those saying yes to the 13th payment need to realise that it won't come free." The question of whether measures to help fund the payment should be temporary or permanent was another sticking point. A time-limited solution would have made the need for structural reforms even more pressing.

Shopping bills are set to rise – meaning all sections of the population will help to fund the 13th state pension payment. Photo: Alexander Faé, Unsplash

On a knife edge

The issue highlighted fault lines not only across the political spectrum but also within individual parties. Politicians faced pressure from their colleagues not to break rank. The outcome was on a knife edge throughout. After much wrangling, the different factions arrived at an initial compromise during the summer session: increase the standard rate of VAT by 0.4 percentage points from 2028 to cover at least part of the additional cost. The measure requires an amendment to the Federal Constitution and will, therefore, be put to the vote of the people and the cantons.

The Federal Council originally suggested increasing VAT by 0.7 percentage points until 2030, but parliament had other ideas. An alliance of Centre and SP politicians dominated proceedings in the Council of States, aiming at first for a VAT increase of up to one percentage point.

The upper house revised this target after fierce criticism from the National Council, eventually settling on a 0.4 percentage point increase while also proposing higher state pension contributions. VAT is not socially equitable as an instrument in itself, argued a majority in the Council of States. People on low incomes would be hit more in comparative terms than those on high incomes, whereas pay deductions would put the onus more on higher earners. Combining both elements would provide the 13th OASI payment with a broad foundation and secure its long-term future, the Council of States concluded.

But there was opposition to this plan within the National Council. The Swiss People's Party (SVP), the Liberals (FDP) and the Green Liberals

“Those saying yes to the 13th payment need to realise that it won't come free.”

National Councillor Thomas Rechsteiner

(GLP) pushed back vehemently against the idea of higher pension contributions, emphasising that paid work needed to remain attractive, and that people earning a living already had enough to contend with. “We don't want any further redistribution from young to old – it would be unfair on working people,” said GLP National Councillor Patrick Hässig, adding that a VAT hike was the lesser of two evils. It would mean non-earners – including pensioners and tourists – also having to pay their share. But the SVP, FDP and GLP would only countenance a temporary VAT increase. They said that shoring up pensions in the long term was the priority, requiring urgent structural reforms – such as incentives for people to stay in work for longer, or automatic stabilising mechanisms to take account of demographic trends.

Yet the GLP, unwilling to risk a funding impasse, changed tack at the very last moment and grudgingly voted in favour of a VAT hike with no time limit.

Higher prices from 2028

If voters endorse parliament's decision, companies will have a two-year buffer before they have to adjust their prices, with consumers paying more from 2028 onwards. VAT would increase from 8.1 to 8.5 percent. A reduced rate of 2.6 percent would continue to apply to basic items like food, medication, books and newspapers,

but the special rate for the hotel and accommodation sector would rise from 3.8 to four percent.

The VAT increase should generate around 1.5 billion francs a year in revenue, which is not even half of what is needed to fund the additional OASI payment. None of the political parties are completely satisfied. Their ideas on how to secure the long-term viability of the state pension differ considerably. Reaching any compromise is tricky. Reaction to the Federal Council's OASI reform proposals for the period from 2030 to 2040 is another prime example. The government wants to incentivise people to work beyond the age of 65, but has chosen not to increase the retirement age. The future of the state pension per se will soon be on the parliamentary agenda. And the debate will continue.

The 13th state pension payment

The additional state pension (OASI) payment will coincide with the normal state pension payment in December. OASI recipients will be notified in advance. People entitled to a state pension from 1 January 2026 can find all relevant details in their pension award notice. OASI recipients who live abroad do not need to take any action.

The 13th payment will correspond to one twelfth of an insured person's annual pension. How much a person receives will depend on their pension contributions and income situation. Individuals will receive a maximum of 2,520 francs, and married couples no more than 3,780 francs. The 13th OASI payment has no bearing on supplementary benefits and is not taken into account when calculating these benefits. There is no additional pension payment for widows, widowers or orphans. Disability pension payments will also remain limited to 12 times a year.

(ERU)

No more fireworks?

Animal welfare and environment groups have tabled an initiative that seeks to ban the sale and private use of loud fireworks across Switzerland. The proposal will be put to the vote of the people and the cantons on 29 November 2026 – after parliament rejected a counterproposal at the very last moment.

SUSANNE WENGER

Swiss citizens can put political issues on the agenda by launching popular initiatives. They first have to collect at least 100,000 signatures. Some proposals that clear this hurdle prompt head-scratching abroad. How about cow horns in 2018? Pyrotechnics could be this year's equivalent – because of an initiative submitted in 2023 that seeks to ban the sale and private use of loud fireworks (see "Swiss Review" 3/2025).

Campaigners – spearheaded by Roman Huber, a dog trainer and former journalist from Aargau, and Corinne Meister, an IT expert and animal owner from St Gallen – have stressed that they do not want a blanket ban. Low-noise fireworks like volcano fountains would be exempt, as would public firework displays on public holidays like Swiss National Day on 1 August, subject to cantonal approval. The initiative is backed by three animal welfare groups, including Swiss Animal Protection (SAP), which has a large membership base.

The initiators of the proposal say that house pets, livestock, and wild animals need to be spared the distress and disruption caused by the detonation and visual effects of rockets and firecrackers. The noise is also harmful to people, they argue. Particulate matter from fireworks is a health risk, while pollutants find their way into soil and water. There are also over 200 accidents involving fireworks every year, they note.



Not everyone wants fireworks – a popular initiative is seeking to restrict their use across Switzerland. Pictured: the 2022 Swiss National Day celebration in Lausanne. Photo: Keystone

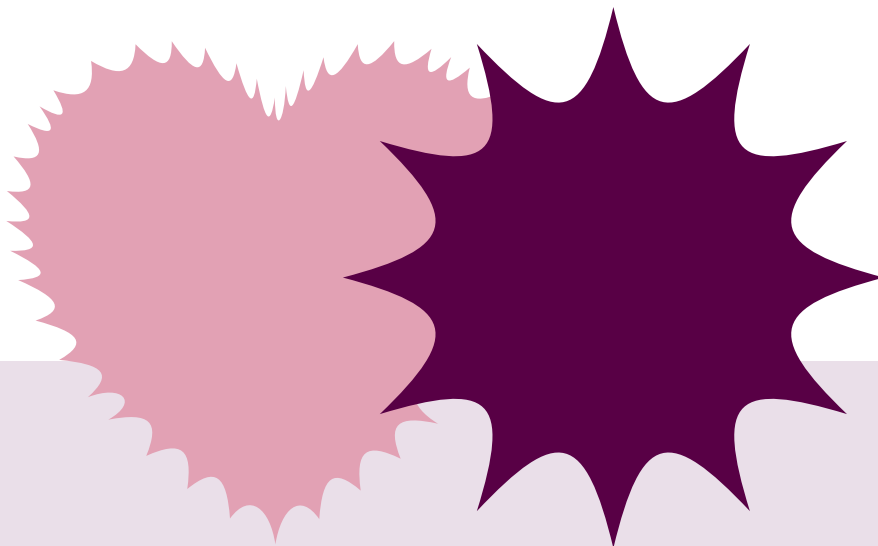
Opponents warn of overregulation

The federal government has rejected the initiative. A majority in parliament also oppose it, their main thrust being that the proposal will lead to overregulation. Cantons and municipalities already have the authority to restrict fireworks – as they did during this year's National Day celebrations because of the dry conditions posing a fire hazard. Numerous municipalities have already imposed permanent restrictions or bans, with the popular mountain and tourist regions of Grisons taking the lead.

Fireworks are a tradition on Swiss National Day, not to mention an increasingly integral part of New Year's Eve celebrations, say opponents of the initiative, who warn of the business impact of a nationwide ban and call on people to show tolerance and accountability instead. Nevertheless, both parliamentary chambers initially backed a counterproposal offering a watered-down version of what was on the table. In particular, lawmakers suggested banning firecrackers that produce a bang but no visual display.

However, the National Council surprisingly threw out its own amendments in the final vote of the summer session, taking the counterproposal off the table – the result of an unlikely cross-party alliance between right and left. The conservative SVP and FDP thought the counterproposal overstepped the mark, while the Greens deemed it too soft. Only the original initiative will be put to voters.





Fireworks – what a blast

I admit it: I am one of those part-time pyrotechnics fanatics who “pointlessly” set off rockets and firecrackers. I know how noisy, environmentally harmful, and dangerous they are – to health and even to life. I know I am polluting the air and causing stress to innocent animals. But I love it.

The 1 August fireworks have been my ritual for the last 50 years. A way to celebrate life. They even taught me the virtue of saving money. Only after months of squirrelling away pocket money could I afford enough “ammo” to spend hours firing salvos with my cannon made from a tube of cardboard. If the cannon caught fire, my father would put the flames out – mimicking an air raid siren as he did so. My dad was a serious man, but even he was a child at heart on 1 August, indulging my boyhood dreams. Just as I would later enjoy living out the child in me as a dad, egged on by my daughter: “Papa, you’re the best!”

Fireworks were always meant to entertain the masses – ever since they were invented by the Chinese in 200 BCE before arriving in Europe in the 14th century. Public festivities harnessed the spectacle of fire to make great shows. Just as amateur pyrotechnicians do today. And don’t we all like to show off now and again?

But the fun is over. Over two thousand years later, and fireworks are suddenly taboo. The sensible people have been leading the backlash, not least since war in Europe became brutal reality again. And yes – I think the fun police will win, regardless of whether the proposed ban is endorsed. Not only do they have sounder arguments, but timid has also become the new zeitgeist. If children turn up at playgrounds wearing helmets, then we probably shouldn’t expect something as risky as fireworks to be tolerated much longer.

I won’t put up a fight, nor expect you to either. Fireworks have had their day. No use in crying. Better to be grateful to have had the experience. As fume-laden and noisy the heyday of fireworks may have been, it was also full of joy and cheer. And wonderfully pointless. What a blast!

Rudolf Gafner is a freelance journalist based in Burgdorf (canton of Berne)

Fireworks – what a racket

Growing up, I, too, remember the enthusiasm for fireworks, set off in Swiss front gardens and neighbourhood streets every year on 1 August. Not that I was particularly drawn to the spectacle, but neither did it bother me. I always enjoyed the Catherine wheel that my father would nail to a telegraph pole. It would spin faster and faster, throwing out sparks. I also have fond memories of the fireworks at our local summer lake festival, the Alps lending a glowing backdrop to the colourful display. It was beautiful.

That was then. Now it’s just a constant banging and whizzing. Not only are the pyrotechnics more varied these days, but unfortunately they are also much more powerful. Back in the day, people lovingly lit rockets made from empty bottles of mineral water. Nowadays, we’re talking multiple-launch batteries taking several dozens of quick-fire shots in less than a minute – turning the village square into a cardboard-strewn battlefield. The bigger the budget, the louder, the longer and more frequent the fireworks. Money is not in short supply in Switzerland.

The result? Exasperated neighbours, quivering dogs, terrified cattle, and birds driven from their nests. Air pollution. Rubbish. Accidents. Fireworks are a life-affirming tradition, I hear you say. But how inconsiderate is “life-affirming” allowed to be? Most fireworks are made in China – to what extent are they part of our heritage?

But few things are more Swiss than direct democracy. Which is why we can now decide whether the indulgence of a minority should continue to undermine growing awareness of animal and environmental protection. According to a survey conducted in 2024, only 13 percent of the population buy fireworks.

Attitudes have changed, but the fun need not stop. How about Swiss-made fountain fireworks? These are effective enough without the ear-splitting noise. And by all means: let us all enjoy a safely organised public firework display now and again. They can be stunning. Communal experience or showing off? I know what I prefer.

Susanne Wenger is a “Swiss Review” editor



Taxation of married couples – another vote to take place

How should married couples be taxed in Switzerland? Only eight months after the vote on individual taxation, Switzerland must revisit the issue on 29 November 2026, when a fresh initiative is put to the people.

THEODORA PETER

The verdict from Swiss voters on 8 March 2026 was actually quite clear: every married person should fill out their own separate tax return in future. A majority of 54 per cent said yes last spring to the introduction of individual taxation for all, thereby ending tax discrimination against married couples – the so-called “marriage penalty” – at federal and cantonal level. Married couples have been taxed jointly until now, meaning that they have had to pay higher taxes when adding up two incomes. The new tax regime will see every person being taxed individually, regardless of their marital status. According to a follow-up survey conducted by gfs Bern, an institute specialising in political and opinion research, a large majority of people who voted yes did so because they also want equality to be reflected in the tax system.

Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether the result can be fully implemented. This is because the Centre Party is still pushing ahead with a proposal that it submitted back in 2024. Referred to as the “Fairness Initiative”, this proposal would oblige married couples to continue filling out a joint tax return – although the federal tax authorities would then have to ensure that spouses are not penalised for doing so.

The initiative is clearly at odds with the introduction of individual taxation for all, which was approved at the ballot box. Although it concedes that the 8 March 2026 result was clear “in principle”, the Centre Party insists that voters are still entitled to make up their mind about this separate proposal, which would benefit single-income households. The SVP is the only other party backing the Centre Party initiative.

“Nitpicking”

The FDP, SP, Greens, and Green Liberals, on the other hand, call the proposal “nitpicking”, arguing that its main objective – no tax



Finance Minister Karin Keller-Sutter warned parliament of the complex implications of the Centre Party initiative.

Photo: Keystone

The initiative is at odds with the introduction of individual taxation for all, which was approved at the ballot box.

discrimination against married couples – has already been met. These parties formed the female-led cross-party alliance that paved the way for individual taxation in the first place – first in parliament, then at the ballot box on 8 March 2026.

The Federal Council also opposes the initiative. Speaking in parliament, Finance Minister Karin Keller-Sutter (FDP) noted the contradiction that would arise if the initiative was accepted, given that the proposal only concerns direct federal taxation. “The Fed-

eral Act on Individual Taxation would continue to apply at cantonal level,” she warned. This would complicate matters: married couples would only be taxed jointly at federal level, while cantons and municipalities would tax spouses individually. If it wanted to avert this discrepancy, parliament would have to make legislative amendments, Keller-Sutter said. “And this, in effect, would mean parliament trying to override the vote of the people.”

In media interviews, the Centre Party chair Philipp Matthias Bregy rejected claims that the proposal would plunge the tax system into chaos. “Laws have to be amended all the time when we have votes,” he told the German-language public broadcaster SRF, adding that parliament would have to ensure that “a coherent and sensible solution is reached”. On 29 November 2026, voters and cantons will decide whether we get that far in the first place.



Swiss arms exports – should restrictions be loosened?

Parliament has voted to relax the export restrictions outlined in the War Materiel Act. Supporters of this move believe it will strengthen the domestic arms industry and is important to Switzerland's security. The matter will now be decided at the ballot box on 29 November 2026, after a referendum was called to contest the bill.

CHRISTOF FORSTER

Swiss arms exports are a highly emotive issue. According to conservative supporters of parliament's bill to relax export restrictions, Switzerland's defence industry needs to be safeguarded. The domestic market alone is too small to sustain production. And a functional arms sector is crucial to Switzerland being able to defend itself.

The debate surrounding this issue has been fuelled in recent years by foreign criticism of Swiss export restrictions. For example, the Federal Council's decision to block the re-export of Swiss-made Gepard anti-aircraft ammunition to Ukraine in 2022 was met with dismay in Germany. A representative of one particular arms manufacturer told the "NZZ" newspaper that some countries had made the following abundantly clear: "No Chinese, no Swiss". Berne, he noted, had been lumped in with Beijing.

At the end of 2025, parliament voted to relax the War Materiel Act (WMA) following years of debate, approving a bill that would allow Swiss arms manufacturers to export military hardware to any of 25 Western countries, should these countries ever be involved in an armed conflict. These are countries that apply arms export controls equivalent to Switzerland's.

Federal Council veto

The Federal Council would be able to ban exports if it believes that Swiss interests are in jeopardy with regard to foreign affairs, neutrality, or security. There would still be a ban on exports to countries that are carrying out serious and systematic human rights violations or are liable to use weapons against their own people. The purpose of this is to convey to primarily European NATO countries that Switzerland is a reliable partner.

These 25 countries would also be allowed to re-export Swiss arms; at present, they have to ask Berne for permission to do so.

This, again, would be at the discretion of the Federal Council, which may exercise a veto as and when deemed necessary. Even under the amended WMA, a ban on direct exports and re-exports to Ukraine would still apply, because Switzerland, as a neutral country, is obliged to treat all warring parties equally. Left-wing parties and NGOs have called a

Swiss arms exports increased by 43 percent in 2025.

referendum opposing the bill. They say it is not about Ukraine at all, as proponents of the bill initially argued, but ensuring that the Swiss defence industry can make as much money as possible from the build-up of military forces around the world. By loosening the rules, Switzerland is forfeiting control over its exports. And it will increase the

risk of Swiss weapons ending up in countries like Saudi Arabia.

0.21 percent of all exports

In 2025, Swiss arms manufacturers exported products worth 948 million Swiss francs, most of which were ammunition, armoured wheeled vehicles, and small arms. This is equivalent to 0.21 percent of all Swiss goods exports. Arms exports increased by 43 percent last year. Germany, the US, Hungary, Italy, and Luxembourg were the five main recipients. Ammunition and ammunition components accounted for almost half, armoured vehicles and their components for a quarter, and weapons of all calibres for 10 percent of all exported products. According to the federal government, the Swiss defence industry supports around 14,000 full-time jobs when suppliers are included.

We will review the results of the popular votes of 27 September in the next edition of our magazine.



A left-green alliance submitted the necessary number of signatures to force a referendum opposing the bill. National Councillor Priska Seiler Graf (canton of Zurich) speaks into a megaphone. Photo: Keystone

The secret Alpine gold depots

Research at ETH Zurich has uncovered where Swiss banks stashed their gold in the Second World War – and how this helped to cement Switzerland's reputation as a secure financial centre. James Bond also played a role.

CHRISTOF FORSTER

Ludo Groen's new English-language book "Mountains of Gold" – the result of five years of research at ETH Zurich – is proof that history can be presented in a very lucid, engaging manner. The author describes in great detail how gold was moved from the Swiss National Bank (SNB) bunker underneath Berne's Bundesplatz to the Swiss army fortification Fort Bühl near Andermatt (canton of Uri) via covert night-time transports.

Guarded by armed bank officials, every convoy started with lorries pulling into Ostermundigen station from the SNB's Berne headquarters. The bullion would then be loaded onto a goods train counting up to 20 wagons. After reaching Göschenen via Lucerne, the valuable freight would be reloaded onto lorries that then drove up the Schöllenen Gorge to Andermatt. Groen even studied the meteorological records of MeteoSwiss in order to tell the story as accurately as possible. The journeys proved very challenging. During the first one in April 1938, the escort was caught unawares by a heavy snowstorm and unable to leave the fortress via the normal route,

as temperatures plummeted to minus 11 degrees Celsius.

Berne was deemed unsafe

Switzerland was an important conduit for gold during the Second World War. Between 1939 and 1945, the SNB bought 1.2 billion Swiss francs worth



Postcard showing Fort Bühl embedded in the Gotthard massif. This is where the SNB began stashing gold in 1938. Photo: provided/ Library Am Guisanplatz, Berne

of gold from Nazi Germany. This included gold looted from Holocaust victims. Switzerland also traded gold from the Allies. Groen sheds new light on the history of gold in Switzerland. "Being an architect, I wanted to approach the history of gold in Swiss banking differently," he says. Not simply by numbers but through the medium of rooms, buildings and landscapes. Groen is the first person to investigate how Switzerland moved its gold to clandestine Alpine depots during the 1930s and 1940s, establishing banking infrastructure away from the cities.

The evacuation of gold from the federal capital was prompted by the army commander of Berne, who was concerned that an air raid could destroy the city as well as Switzerland's gold reserves, which were mainly stored there. The army and the SNB subsequently met to brainstorm possibilities of moving the gold to secure locations in the Alps. They were in-



The Eismeer station – situated 3,160 metres above sea level, behind the dreaded north face of the Eiger – was offered as a possible location for the SNB's gold, but this solution proved too expensive. Photo: provided/ETH Library, Zurich

spired by Fort Knox in the US, which had been opened in 1936 and housed large quantities of US gold in a heavily fortified military facility.

One of the first Swiss gold depositories was built in the heart of the military “redoubt” – the Alpine defence system designed to deter would-be attackers – in the aforementioned Fort Bühl, directly above the Gotthard tunnel. This made sense for both logistical and symbolic reasons, the author says. The Gotthard was not just any other location, “but, like the Jungfrau, one of mythical proportions”. Gold became intertwined with Switzerland’s national defence.

Not long after the war began, General Henri Guisan expressed unhappiness that the SNB only had one depot in the Alps. The general staff of the armed forces suggested, therefore, that one of its munition depots in Interlaken in the Bernese Oberland be made available at short notice for storing gold – which is indeed what happened. Groen again gives a meticulous account of the transports to this second depot – even mentioning receipts for expenses such as the cost of lunch including gratuities.

The author cross-checked his findings with the report of the Bergier Commission, which investigated Switzerland’s role in the Second World War, and with studies on economic history. In doing so, he discovered that the transports coincided with documented gold shipments from abroad. This revealed a pattern: not long after gold arrived in Switzerland, it would be moved onwards to the Alps.

Switzerland’s strategic U-turn

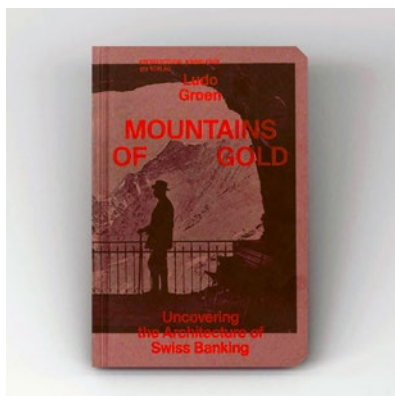
The purpose of the gold depots changed during the course of the war. As Groen explains, Switzerland made

a strategic U-turn in 1940: shifting its thinking from military defence to economic cooperation. The gold depots now facilitated economic collaboration with Nazi Germany, through the trade in looted gold. And the depots in Interlaken and the Gotthard were no longer evacuation sites that needed to be camouflaged against bombing raids; they became efficient logistical hubs instead.

Commercial banks like the Schweizerische Kreditanstalt (SKA) and the Union Bank of Switzerland also had plans to move banknotes, securities and gold to the Alps, with deserted grand hotels in Interlaken and Gstaad earmarked as storage sites. According to the author, plans were drawn up to renovate these ageing hotels and install underground strongrooms. But they were never fully executed.

Switzerland was an important conduit for gold during the Second World War.

The book does not conclude with the war but goes on to reveal the global dimension of the gold trade. A supply chain underpins the gold, says Groen, citing the consequences of gold mining in South Africa – namely, environ-



After the war, banks appropriated the image of the Alps as a safe haven, says architectural historian Ludo Groen.

Photo: provided/ETH, Michel Büchel

mental pollution, bad health, and exploitation of workers, particularly during the apartheid regime. Swiss banks played a role insofar as they issued loans to gold mining companies. Switzerland became a key trading point for South African gold.

Alps – the promise of security

Groen’s perspective therefore extends beyond the Second World War. He argues that the priority of defending the nation fed “the mythology of the Alpine fortress”. After the war, the banks appropriated this image to sell the promise of security, using Alpine imagery to convey a message of impregnability, trustworthiness and safety. For example, the 1982 Credit Suisse poster “Incredibly Swiss” depicted the snow-capped Alps. The two Bond movies filmed in the Alps in the 1960s, “Goldfinger” and “On Her Majesty’s Secret Service”, reinforced the image of Switzerland as a safe haven. Groen: “Switzerland’s international image shows how important the Alps were as the nation’s point of reference.”

“Mountains of Gold”
Ludo Groen,
Gta Verlag 2026

Remembering Blatten – remnants of a buried village

On 28 May 2025, 10 million cubic metres of rock and ice plummeted into the Lötschental valley in the canton of Valais, burying the village of Blatten, which had already been evacuated. Pictures of the landslide captured global attention. The “Memories of Blatten” exhibition, which opened this summer at the Lötschental Museum in Kippel, further down the valley, dispenses with these images. “We chose not to rehash the disaster,” says the museum’s co-director Rita Kalbermatten. Instead, the exhibition remembers what was lost. The landslide – and water from the River Lonza that it blocked – consumed 130 houses along with personal objects, cultural artefacts, and the village church. Memories remain. They are the focal point of this carefully curated, understated exhibition, which features pieces that were rescued from the mud and rubble: a wedding dress, a cowbell, grandma’s hand-woven blanket. Inhabitants of Blatten contributed them voluntarily and later helped set up the exhibition, Kalbermatten explains. Some of these people appear on camera, explaining what the items mean to them. The exhibition includes organ music from the destroyed church as well as paintings and photos from the museum archive. They are the remnants of a buried village, yet they also point to the future – because plans are underway to rebuild Blatten by 2030. Kalbermatten is a Blatten resident herself. “Blatten will remain a part of us, forever and always,” she says.

SUSANNE WENGER

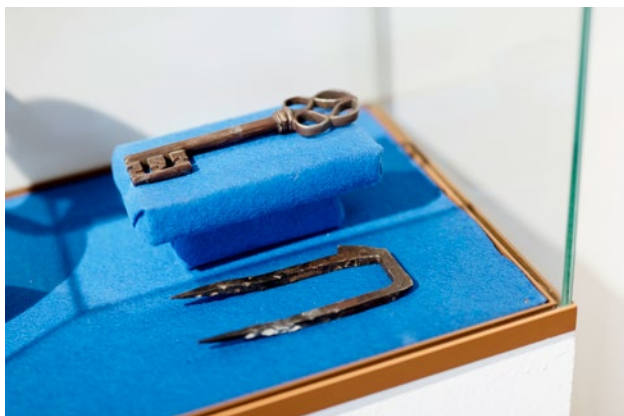
The “Memories of Blatten” exhibition runs at the Lötschental Museum in Kippel until the end of March 2027.

Photos: Alain Amherd



Alfred Nyfeler painted this picture of the Bietschorn in 1962. The landslide began in the area underneath the summit in the left half of the picture.

In May 2025, Blatten disappeared under a huge landslide. An exhibition at the Lötschental Museum now features exhibits from the village.



This is an old key from the village hall, which was buried in the landslide. According to the mayor of Blatten, the key symbolises efforts to rebuild the village.

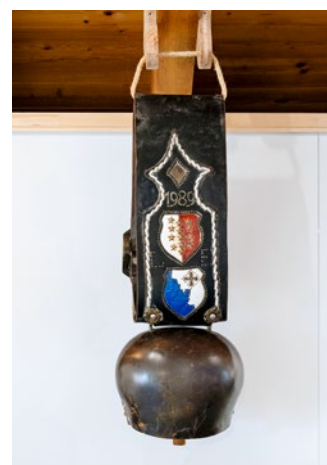
"We chose not to rehash the disaster." Museum co-directors Rita Kalbermatten and Thomas Antoniotti.



This mask, which survived many carnival festivities over the years, was damaged in the landslide.



A Blatten resident received this custom-made cowbell from his godmother and godfather on his 20th birthday. It was retrieved from the rubble.



Retrieved from Blatten: uniforms and a damaged tuba belonging to Fafleralp, the local village band. Fafleralp resumed rehearsals not long after the disaster.



This wedding dress, dating back to 2003, was retrieved from the water. Its owner had it cleaned before bringing it to the museum.



The Hotel Nest- und Bietschhorn, the oldest hotel in the valley, opened in 1868 but was destroyed in the Blatten landslide. Its earliest guest books have been preserved.

Blatten – a photo essay

Valais photographer Alain Amherd, who produced the photos for this double-page article, recently published a photo book on the Blatten landslide. Amherd followed events in Blatten closely. The book, entitled "Und dann war alles still" (And then everything was still), presents a stunning pictorial synopsis of the disaster and its physical and human impact.

www.revue.link/blatten

Johan Manzambi



OK, so Switzerland lost to Argentina on 12 July 2026 in the football World Cup. The outcome of that quarter-final might – might – have been different if forward Breel Embolo had not taken a dive.

Prior to this defeat, a young Geneva player wowed football fans: Johan Manzambi, instantly nicknamed *Manzambig* despite not being particularly tall (5' 11.5"). In the match against Bosnia-Herzegovina, we saw the 20-year-old athlete burst out of the gates like a rocket and score a thrilling goal after only two minutes of play, before scoring a second time in the first half-hour. The match paved Switzerland's way to the round of 32. Manzambi was not in the starting lineup, but his ability to read the game and his audacity made a big impression. The young player with jumbo locs enthralled fans with his "coolness", as he nonchalantly made some daring and unpredictable plays.

Johan Manzambi's family comes from Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo, but he grew up in Geneva. During his match against Bosnia, the young man walked up to a camera and dedicated his goals to his native city at the end of Lake Geneva. He also triggered a whirlwind of excitement among the young people in his childhood neighbourhood, Servette, which is also the name of the club where he began his career. "The combination of discipline and creativity makes him the perfect modern forward," Giorgio Contini, former assistant to Swiss national coach Murat Yakin, wrote in "Le Temps". Following an injury during training, *Manzambig* was unable to go any further in the tournament, and thus escaped the crushing defeat against Argentina. However, his efforts won him the admiration of football fans all over the world.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

E-voting rollout in Lucerne and Neuchâtel

The e-voting rollout continues – now in two more cantons. The popular votes of September 2026 marked the first time that the canton of Lucerne's expatriate voters were able to have their democratic say online. Swiss Abroad affiliated to the canton of Neuchâtel will be able to do likewise from November. Unlike in Lucerne, eligible voters in Neuchâtel will have to register once before using the system. Further information is available on the official Neuchâtel cantonal website: www.revue.link/ne. E-voting makes it easier for Swiss Abroad to exercise their political rights. Postal votes from the "Fifth Switzerland" often arrive at the ballot box too late.

(MUL)

Opposition to 30 km/h speed limit

The Federal Council has hit the brakes on the 30 km/h speed limit. Cities and municipalities can no longer reduce the speed limit on "traffic-oriented roads" to 30 km/h of their own accord, but must first submit an expert assessment proving that any speed reduction will not push traffic into residential areas. This rule, which came into force on 1 October, reflects growing opposition to the 30 km/h speed limit, particularly from motorist groups (see also "Swiss Review" 1/2025). Cities and municipalities, on the other hand, have been clamouring for speed limits.

(MUL)

Switzerland joins NATO-run Ammunition Support Partnership

Switzerland wants to be able to procure ammunition quicker, more easily and more cost-effectively – not least because the war in Ukraine has complicated the European security landscape. This is why it has joined the NATO-run Ammunition Support Partnership (ASP), which now enables 27 participating states, including Switzerland, to procure ammunition jointly – a process offering significant cost savings. The Federal Council believes joining the ASP is consistent with the principles of neutrality, arguing that the ASP is purely a procurement consortium and that Switzerland can withdraw from the partnership at any time.

(MUL)

Army wants fewer civilian deployments

The Swiss Army provides many non-military services to society, such as erecting infrastructure for Swiss wrestling festivals, other sporting events, and major music festivals. According to information obtained by the "NZZ", the army devoted a total of 26,000 service days to civilian deployments in 2025. Army commanders have now decided there is no basis for this work, nor is it viable anymore. In future, the army will refocus on enhancing its defensive capabilities. Although this aligns with the Federal Council's new guidelines on the future of the armed forces, the change in direction remains controversial amid realities on the ground: army helicopters had to airlift emergency water supplies to drought-stricken farms in the Swiss Alps this summer.

(MUL)

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Hot summer, hot parties and a rather cool neighbourhood

3.5

It would be remiss of us not to mention Switzerland's blistering summer of 2026. The national average temperature in June was 3.5°C above the average for the last 30 years. It exceeded the norm by 3.2°C in July. The heatwave continued in August. Many towns and cities recorded their highest temperatures since records began in 1864. The summer months also saw significantly less rainfall than normal.

SOURCE: METEO SWISS

71

Do you ever sit down for a coffee – or even a beer – with any of your neighbours? Most Swiss (71 percent) never or only very rarely do. A growing reluctance to venture out of our bubble also means that there has been a notable drop in volunteering. Only 26 percent now say that they formally volunteer. This is down from 35 percent in 2020.

SOURCE: "NZZ AM SONNTAG"

830,000

Pulling up the proverbial drawbridge is one thing, communal experiences are another. On 12 July, tens of thousands of people around the country went to live screenings of the Switzerland-Argentina FIFA World Cup quarter-final match – braving the 3 a.m. kick-off. A total of 830,000 people watched the game live.

SOURCE: SRF MEDIA PORTAL

600

The hot, dry weather increased the risk of fires, which is why fireworks on 1 August were banned almost everywhere this year. Bonfires were also prohibited. Could a longstanding tradition be in danger? Maybe, but our ancestors managed to get through 600 years without celebrating: there was no Swiss National Day at all until 1891.

SOURCE: HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF SWITZERLAND



900,000

There were packed crowds in the centre of Zurich on 9 August, when 900,000 colourful revellers turned the city into a huge dance floor at the world's biggest techno party, the Street Parade. Due to the sweltering heat, ravers were also keen on keeping cool under the misting systems and shower installations situated along the parade route.

SOURCE: WWW.SRF.CH

Jean Ziegler, the man who dared to bite the hand that fed him

The outspoken socialist Jean Ziegler has died aged 92, after succumbing to a long illness. Known throughout the world, he was both loved and hated in his native land. He helped end banking secrecy and shone a spotlight on how hunger was used as a political weapon.



STÉPHANE HERZOG

Erica Deuber Ziegler welcomes us to her beautiful home, in the hills of the village of Russin, in Geneva. She is the widow of Jean Ziegler, who died in June of Parkinson's disease, which he called "that crap". After the funeral, which was held in St. Peter's Cathedral to the sound of the Internationale, it is time for her to take care of his legacy. The art historian, a former deputy of the Grand Council of Geneva who had met the Berne-born sociologist when typing up the proofs of his works, is sorting through hundreds of cardboard boxes. Some of it will be entrusted to the Federal Archives. The living room table is covered with photocopied obituaries of the former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food worldwide. "A voice

against global inequalities" was the headline in "Vatican News". "The revolutionary in a bespoke suit," wrote the "NZZ".

There is a wicker basket containing over 300 letters of condolence, including one from former SVP Federal Councillor Christoph Blocher. "They didn't agree on anything, but they respected each other," says Deuber Ziegler. The author of "Une Suisse au-dessus de tout soupçon" (1976) [A Switzerland above all suspicion] and "La Suisse lave plus blanc" (1990) [Switzerland washes whiter] was an uncompromising character. His last word was a loud "no" to a nurse who was trying to get him to eat, according to his widow. What impact did Jean Ziegler have on Swiss politics? "He played a fundamental role, not

"Rebellious, audacious, and immune to criticism" – Jean Ziegler (1934–2026)
Photo: Keystone

from a legislative perspective but by saying publicly what nobody else had dared to say up till then," in the view of professor of political science Pascal Sciarini. He spoke out about Nazi gold in Switzerland, unclaimed funds, dictators' dirty money kept in Swiss bank accounts under the guise of banking secrecy.

And "man-made" hunger. Some say that the Geneva native, who travelled to some of the poorest regions on the planet, had no qualms about "biting the hand that fed him", the hand of Swiss prosperity, partly due to banks. "His knack for finding a killer phrase, and for exaggerating, made him popular amongst the converted and an opponent who needed to be silenced to the targets of his criticism," says the political scientist,

who does, however, point out that repeated inaccuracies in Ziegler's statements sometimes undermined their impact.

"Killing" the father

Born in Thun to a Calvinist father, who was a judge and artillery colonel, Jean Ziegler was aware of poverty from a very young age. During the Second World War, "he saw poorly dressed children placed with families. What should we do? he asked his father, who replied: *Mach di Sach*, which translates as everyone should mind their own business," recalls Erica Deuber Ziegler. The Calvinist concept of predestination sickened him. Jean Ziegler went on to "kill" his father by converting to Catholicism and becoming a Marxist. This from the man whose maternal grandfather was one of the founders of the Swiss People's Party.

In 1961, after obtaining a doctorate in law and becoming a lawyer, Jean Ziegler travelled to the Congo as a UN special envoy. This would give rise to his interest in decolonisation and his approach of developmental sociology. In Paris, he rubbed shoulders with Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Rebellious, audacious and "immune to criticism", according to his friend, property developer and author Metin Ardit, Ziegler drew the ire of the courts. In 1991, the Swiss Parliament voted to lift his parliamentary immunity, paving the way for nine lawsuits for defamation, which he lost. None of this would prevent the sociologist being re-elected, in the same year, to the National Council. He moved in with his second wife in her house in Russin, where the bailiffs came to call more than once, the art historian remembers.

The "NZZ" called Jean Ziegler "The revolutionary in a bespoke suit".



"His last word was 'no'" – art historian and former politician Erica Deuber Ziegler reminiscing about her husband's life.
Photo: Stéphane Herzog

A high point of his career was when he met Ernesto Che Guevara in Geneva in 1964. "Jean was called to act as a guide," his widow recalls. For 10 days, the sociologist, who became vice-chairman of the United Nations Human Rights Council Advisory Committee in 2009, took Che around Geneva and explained the Swiss political system to him. Jean Ziegler offered to accompany him to Cuba. "The head of the monster is here. You need to fight in this city," Che commanded. "It was as if Christ had spoken to him," Erica Deuber Ziegler recalls.

Denouncing banking secrecy

One of the criticisms levelled against Jean Ziegler was that he met with revolutionaries who became dictators: Fidel Castro, Robert Mugabe, Muammar Gaddafi, Hugo Chávez. "Jean met Gaddafi three times to ask him about the situation of the populations of the Sahel. He said that was once too many," his widow says. "He stood

with the people living under dictatorships," comments the former Social Democratic Party Federal Councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey, who praised his courage and his ability to condemn the hypocritical actions of Switzerland. One such example was in 1998, when he appeared before the US Senate Banking Committee to argue the idea that only economic sanctions would force Swiss banks to repay the funds from unclaimed accounts.

"When he denounced banking secrecy, he did the banks a favour, as they realised that they would have to make changes in pursuit of excellence," believes Metin Ardit. Former FDP Federal Councillor Pascal Couchepin is of a different view: "He saw himself as the representative of the third world, but he picked the wrong heroes. Ultimately, Jean Ziegler bequeathed Switzerland a rather modest legacy," he stated to the press after Ziegler's death. The barb brings a smile to Erica Deuber Ziegler's face as she points out, among other things, that her husband was known all around the world.

"He picked the wrong heroes."

Pascal Couchepin,
former Federal Councillor (FDP)

On 1 August, in the small municipality of Choulex (Geneva), his son, playwright Dominique Ziegler, made a speech at the invitation of the local authorities. "For the past 10 years, UBS has contributed 211 billion US dollars to projects connected with oil and gas. It's absolutely insane," he told the villagers, following in the footsteps of his late father.



Many of the slopes surrounding the lake basin at Buochs continue for 200 metres underwater, where large amounts of mud and rock would have piled up over many centuries. Photo: Keystone

Tsunamis on Swiss lakes – “the danger is real”

In 1601, at least 10 people lost their lives in a tsunami on Lake Lucerne that was triggered underwater after an earthquake. Could such a disaster happen again?

DÖLF BARBEN

People tend to associate tsunamis with oceans. Many will recall the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami that killed around 230,000 people on 26 December 2004, triggered by an earthquake off the west coast of Indonesia.

But tsunamis in Switzerland? That scenario is nowhere near as improbable as it may seem. “The danger is real,” says professor of geology at the University of Bern, Flavio Anselmetti, who has been studying this possibility with the help of colleagues from Berne and ETH Zurich for over 10 years.

Probably no other tsunami in Switzerland has been documented to such a degree as the one that occurred on 18 September 1601 on Lake Lucerne – also after an earthquake. “With a (reconstructed) magnitude of 5.9, the quake violently shook the whole of central Switzerland. Trees and houses were uprooted, mountainsides crumbled.”

This quote is from a Swiss National Museum blog post written by 32-year-old historian Noah Businger, who found out about the event while

studying at university. Businger, who hails from central Switzerland, was eager to learn more and has proceeded to supplement historical knowledge with the latest research.

No singing or shouting

Lucerne’s official chronicler Renward Cysat (1545–1614) recorded details of what happened. Waves up to five metres high crashed into the shoreline near Buochs, penetrating as far as one kilometre inland. At least 10 people died. Boats were swept well beyond the shore. In Lucerne, the water in the River Reuss was repeatedly drawn right out into the lake only to suddenly come rushing back in again. This was what we would now call a seiche, or standing wave, where all the water oscillates back and forth from one side of the lake to the other as if it were in a bathtub.

The locals had no idea what had hit them. “It must have been terrifying,” says Businger. People thought it was God’s punishment for their sins. The authorities sought to placate the Almighty and banned excessive feasting and celebrating as well as danc-



Higher, farther, faster, more beautiful?
In search of somewhat unconventional
Swiss records
Today: extreme waves

ing, singing and shouting for several months.

But what exactly had happened? Scientists now know, thanks not least to what Cysat wrote. The boats had run aground as much as “two halberds” – roughly four metres – above the normal waterline, making it possible to deduce how high the waves would have been. Talking to Flavio Anselmetti, however, it becomes clear that the earthquake did not cause the tsunami directly.

“Like a slab of snow that comes loose”

Many of the slopes surrounding the lake basin at Buochs continue for 200 metres underwater, where large amounts of mud and rock would have piled up over many centuries. The earthquake sent much of this material sliding. Anselmetti: “It was like a slab of snow coming loose.” Multiple sediment avalanches descended to the bottom of the lake, pushing water upwards – after having pulled water downwards into the space it had left behind. Lake Lucerne would have been in tumult.

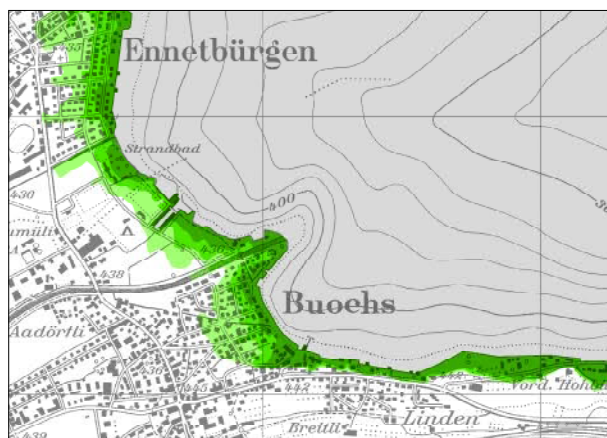
The crucial point is this: when all the water at a specific point rises up from the bottom like a column, the energy is intense – generating a tsunami wave that travels quietly but barely loses any strength.

If a massive chunk of rock fell into the lake, this would cause a different kind of wave, Anselmetti says. The surge may well be even greater than a tsunami wave to begin with, but would weaken very quickly. The transfer of energy would be relatively modest, because most of it would be restricted to the surface of the lake without large masses of water being displaced.

Several risk factors

But what about the current tsunami risk on Switzerland's lakes? According to Anselmetti, two exacerbating factors come into play: firstly, "susceptible" underwater slopes packed with mud, and secondly, flat shorelines. The flatter the land, the further a wave can penetrate. Buochs has both these ingredients. However, most of the underwater slopes in Lake Lucerne expelled so much sediment in the 1601 earthquake that it will still take centuries before similar deposits build up to a critical level again, he says.

An underwater slope is "susceptible" if it has a gradient of around 10 to 25 degrees, he continues. Any steeper, and barely any sediment would settle. Any flatter, and no big slippages would occur. Lakes Geneva, Thun and Zug all have underwater slopes that could collapse and trigger a tsunami after an earthquake. Surrounded by steep mountains, lakes Oeschinen, Walen, Lungern and Brienz are examples of lakes where rockfall-induced wave surges are to be expected, he explains.



The canton of Nidwalden has produced a map showing which areas of shoreline would be flooded in the event of a tsunami.

Map: provided/canton of Nidwalden

Some Swiss cantons are in the process of mapping tsunami risk. Nidwalden, which bore the brunt in 1601, is the first canton to have done so already – given that there are insurance considerations to take into account, among other things. Wave surges like the one in 1601 would still cause significant damage today.

Earthquake?

Get away from the shore

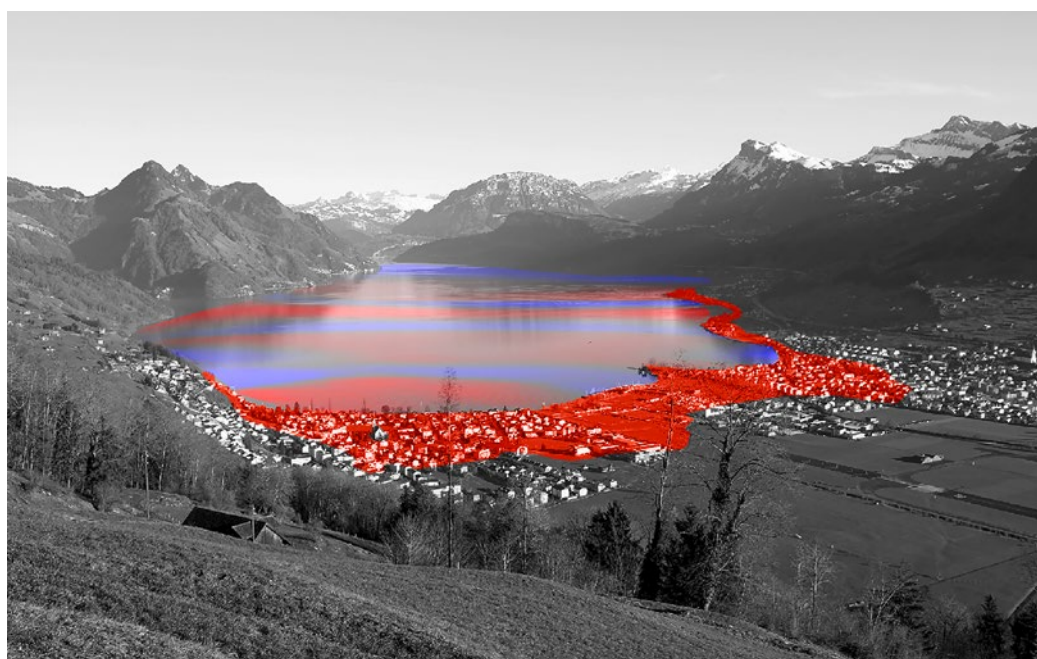
Thanks to modern multibeam sonar systems, it is now possible to map lake floors with centimetre accuracy and reveal structures and patterns that were unknown until recently. Lake Zurich shows sections where

slopes have already given way. Objects dating back to the Stone Age were discovered in Lake Constance.

Anselmetti is spearheading the work. Scientists can now pinpoint "loaded" underwater slopes. These analyses are ongoing, he says. The results will be incorporated into hazard maps.

But how could people be warned if there were another tsunami? Advanced buoy-and-siren warning systems are a challenge to deploy, given the rarity of such an event and the short warning times involved, the geologist says. Yet simply being knowledgeable of the danger can itself make a difference, as it would anywhere around the world. If you are near a flat shoreline during an earthquake, it is advisable to get away from that area. "A tsunami is most likely coming."

Lake Lucerne in a state of tumult – this visualisation shows how far the 1601 tsunami penetrated into Ennetbürgen (left) and Buochs. Visualisation: provided/Flavio Anselmetti



Beavers are recreating wetlands destroyed by humans

Beavers, which were once killed for their pelts and their meat, were reintroduced in Switzerland from the late 1950s. The dams they build enclose bodies of water that trap CO₂, absorb pollutants and promote biodiversity. Their habitat includes the banks of the River Sense in Fribourg.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

We let biologist Cécile Auberson lead the way. She is taking us to beaver territory, in Zumholz (Fribourg), on the banks of the Sense. “This is one of the rare Swiss rivers to have been left in its natural state,” explains the scientist, who works for the national beaver centre of the info fauna foundation. In this region, the river’s path is dictated by its currents, forming braids, to use the technical term. We walk alongside the Dütschbach, a small tributary of the Sense, crossing over wooden walkways. In the heart of this wooded area, where temperatures are pleasant even during the heatwave, we arrive at the edge of a large lagoon.

Better than engineers

This is a typical beaver reservoir, formed when the animals build dams. “They use their front paws to place mud at the base of their dams,” explains Auberson. Close by is a lodge, which houses a family of beavers. They will emerge at nightfall. Why do these mammals create aquatic areas? Beavers go underwater to reach their lodges, which keep them safe from their predators, including lynxes (which live in the region) and, in other regions, wolves and foxes. These mammals, which can stay underwater for 15 minutes at a time and build their dams in unpredictable places, sometimes flooding roads and fields,

need an aquatic environment at least 60 cm deep to survive. The water takes some of the weight off the occasionally massive pieces of wood they use to build their homes.

Beavers build dams where they want.

Beavers were killed for their fur. Their revival has led to more wetlands being created.

Photo: info fauna

“Beavers are more effective at creating wetlands than engineers,” observes Marie Bessat, who is in charge of the rural nature programme at the Geneva Cantonal Agriculture and Nature Bureau. The image of these animals has changed radically since they disappeared from Swiss territory in the early 19th century and began to be reintroduced in the late 1950s. Beavers used to be hunted for their pelts (which were used to make hats), their meat and their castoreum, an oily secretion used in medicine. In addition, beavers paid the price for mankind’s widespread expropriation of lakes and rivers. Most of the rivers, deltas and marshes in Switzerland were drained or rerouted to make room for farms and houses. Prior to this forcible redirection, Swiss rivers were dotted with logjams: floating wood barricades, mainly created by beavers. The American journalist Ben Goldfarb tells the story in a book published in 2018 devoted to the resurgence of beavers. The River Skagit, in the state of Washington, “looked less like a river and more like a massive floating sawmill. These piles of wood were not a nuisance; on the



contrary – they made a prime habitat for salmon,” he notes.

Nature's allies

Once hunted, massacred and scorned, beavers are back. Their population in Switzerland and Liechtenstein has gone from a handful of individuals, when they were first reintroduced, to almost 4,900 animals today, spread across 1,402 territories, according to the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN). Their presence acts against the collapse of biodiversity in Switzerland, which itself is linked to the disappearance of wetlands. Over 80 percent of all animal species in Switzerland live in flood plains, according to FOEN. In this situation, there is a natural ally – and an economic one, given that the Confederation has allocated an annual budget of 40 million Swiss francs to support projects to revive and renature rivers – the beaver.

On the banks of the Sense, Cécile Auberson points out the trees submerged in the pond. “There are more ecological niches here – in the sun and in the shade – than anywhere else,” she says. Moreover, the wetlands created by beavers act as carbon and methane sinks, trapping these molecules in the water. They also filter out the nitrates produced by farms, among other sources. In addition, these reservoirs contribute to refilling the water table and can buffer the effects of heavy flooding. This is exactly what is needed in an urbanised country like Switzerland, which is threatened by droughts in summer.

As a study by info fauna has shown, the dams built by beavers increase biodiversity and biological mass. On

average, their presence results in 2.6 times more species and 5.9 times more animals of those species. “The reservoirs I study on the left bank in Geneva have seen the return of kingfishers,” Marie Bessat is delighted to note.

“Kingfishers
have returned.”

Marie Bessat, head of the rural nature programme
at the Geneva Cantonal
Agriculture and Nature Bureau

The hitch is that beavers are unpredictable in where they create their reservoirs. For example, beavers built dams in an industrial district in Geneva, on the left bank of Lake Geneva, which triggered flooding. The cantonal authorities have responded by monitoring water levels; if they rise suddenly, the height of the dam is lowered to prevent a sudden inrush of water, explains Bessat. In the view of Cécile Auberson, beavers unveil situations where urbanisation failed to take account of the natural environment. “When a road floods,



you often see that the rules governing construction, which stipulate a minimum distance between the river and the road, were not followed,” she says. The national beaver centre



Reservoir created by
beavers near the Sense,
in Zumholz (Fribourg).
Photo: Stéphane Herzog

Biologist
Cécile Auberson
Photo: Stéphane Herzog

thus organised a symposium aimed at civil engineers, to raise awareness of these issues.

Beavers are hard to spot but, sometimes, living in such close proximity to humans makes them less shy. This has been observed in Carouge (Geneva), near Beaver Island, a protected area on the River Arve, where some fine specimens can be spotted from a bridge. Beavers look like big marmots with a broad tail, which the animals slap against the water to warn of danger. In Carouge, you can also see how fluidly they swim underwater.

www.revue.link/biber

Authors deliver wake-up call on human rights



TAREK NAGUIB ET AL.
“Menschenrechte.
Die Schweiz in der
Verantwortung”
Verlag Schulthess,
Zurich, 2026. 145 pages,
CHF 38

Human rights are being eroded around the world – and not only in authoritarian states. Nor are they set in stone in democracies like Switzerland. They cannot be upheld in the absence of effective safeguards. Twenty authors from academia or a professional practice background have contributed to a new book that hits where it hurts, addressing themes such as inadequate protection against discrimination, the controversial use of detention in asylum proceedings, and the fundamental rights of vulnerable groups.

Pertinently, the book contains a chapter on AI, algorithms and the digital transformation. When it comes to protecting democracy and fundamental rights, “we should not rely on the good will of big tech,” writes Angela Müller, who is Executive Director of the non-governmental organisation Algorithm-Watch CH. Statutory guard rails are needed

to ensure responsible use of AI. Lawyer and ETH researcher Jakob Merane believes that technology also offers opportunities in areas such as consumer rights, where AI-powered programs make it easier to identify online data privacy violations.

The book also deals with the institutional implementation of human rights. Unlike most countries, Switzerland has no constitutional court to monitor human rights compliance. This is why the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg take on special importance, says professor of international law Helen Keller, citing press freedom as an example. Keller was an ECtHR judge from 2011 to 2020. The ECtHR has criticised Switzerland more than once in recent years for prosecuting journalists who, for instance, refused to divulge their sources or used hidden cameras to expose dubious sales practices.

The authors express concern that the ECtHR, which safeguards human rights standards in Europe, is coming under increased pressure. One example is the controversy surrounding implementation of the ECtHR ruling in favour of a group of older Swiss women who took Switzerland to court (see “Swiss Review” 6/2023 and 4/2024).

This clearly presented, easy-to-understand book is not only a wake-up call but a source of ideas. It envisions Switzerland as a country that takes the lead on human rights and bolsters the standing of international institutions.

THEODORA PETER

The Ukrainian War Requiem – led by a Swiss composer



BENEDICT SHEEHAN
“Ukrainian War Requiem”,
Cappella Records, 2025

Listen to the Ukrainian
War Requiem:
www.revue.link/uwr

Swiss composer and choir leader Michael Zaugg told a talk show host on Canada’s Global News channel that he likes to cook. He enjoys using ingredients with special characteristics and forming these into a harmonious, coherent whole. Cooking is, essentially, not too dissimilar to his orchestral and choral work, he said.

Zaugg studied choral conducting in Basel before embarking on a postgraduate programme in Stockholm. He emigrated to Canada over 20 years ago, where he now lives with his family. The conductor is the Managing and Artistic Director of Pro Coro Canada in Edmonton, one of Canada’s leading profes-

sional chamber choirs. In this role, he has forged a musical blend that has earned him and his choir great acclaim. Pro Coro Canada have now performed on an acoustic album that even people who know nothing about classical choir music can relate to: the Ukrainian War Requiem by Benedict Sheehan, who is a globally important American composer of 21st-century classical religious music.

A few months ago, the recording won the 2026 Juno Award for Best Classical Album in the “Large Ensemble” category. The Juno Awards are Canada’s premier music industry awards, often described as the equivalent of the Grammy Awards in the US. Zaugg and his choir collaborated on the album with the Axios Men’s Ensemble, a Canadian choir dedicated to performing Eastern sacred music in both liturgical and concert settings for modern audiences. Axios also includes Ukrainian singers.

A requiem is a musical work composed to commemorate the dead. Yet Sheehan’s work is more than just that. The Ukrainian War Requiem not only honours the countless victims of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine but also pays tribute to the resistance of the Ukrainian people. Zaugg wanted the recording to encapsulate the Ukrainian spirit. He says his task was to bring together different nationalities – Ukrainians, Canadians, Americans – and mould an ensemble in which everyone felt welcome and at ease. Doing so was a source of great joy.

It is a sentiment that resonates throughout this magnificent album – even if you listen to it from the comfort of your armchair. The brutality of death in war is a reality. As is the undying will to live.

JÜRGEN STEINER

Ukrainian War Requiem. Composer: Benedict Sheehan. Conductor: Michael Zaugg.
Pro Coro Canada, Axios Men’s Ensemble. Soloists: John Tessier, Yulia Zasimova.
Available on all streaming platforms.

A reckoning with Switzerland

Writer Lukas Bärfuss grew up in precarious circumstances in the Bernese Oberland. His new, autobiographical book “Königin der Nacht” (Queen of the Night) traces the life of his mother, who never loved him. Poverty drove her to the Dominican Republic, where she emigrated on a measly pension.

SUSANNE WENGER

Lukas Bärfuss is one of Switzerland’s most prominent writers. Born in Thun in 1971, he is a qualified bookseller, an award-winning author, a father, and a resident of Zurich. He writes novels, plays and essays – and contributes to political debates. Bärfuss is often scathing of his country, lamenting what he sees as a yawning gap between rhetoric and reality. This has landed him in hot water more than once, his critics accusing him of being polarising and overly simplistic. His latest book is a very personal piece of work. He writes about his mother – and about growing up on the margins of society.

The moving account begins in Santo Domingo, where his mother spent the last 20 years of her life as a Swiss Abroad. After her death, Bärfuss found a bank statement in her flat. All she had in her account was 60 Swiss francs. Bärfuss agonised over why he had never helped her. Yet they had not been in contact for years. The author explains why in the longest chapter, which covers his childhood in Thun. It was there that he lived alone with his mother. She had become a single parent after divorcing his father, who had been sent to prison for petty crimes.

Roaming the streets at 15

His mother worked as a cleaner by day, before transforming into a beautiful “queen of the night” – at a bar that was known to be frequented by some of the town’s dignitaries. Erotic appeal was her sole capital in a wealthy country, her son writes. When this allure began to fade, she worked in the local ammunition factory. Money was tight, and in winter their flat stayed cold. The mother saw her son as an “occupational accident” and a burden. Bärfuss suffered severe neglect. “She was not a mother,” he writes, “she was a liability.” One day, he found the flat half-empty. She had simply moved out without telling the then 15-year-old Bärfuss.

For several years, Bärfuss had no fixed abode and slept in parks or in shopping malls. He hid from the authorities, who would have otherwise branded him “antisocial” – given his parents’ history and his mother’s Traveller family background. He got by doing odd jobs – and read books that shaped his mind and allowed him to dream. A teacher training scholarship offered him an opening, but his mother took the money and left for the Dominican Republic. She would have been unable to live off her pension in Switzerland.

Bärfuss visited his mother once in Santo Domingo, seeking answers. But the meeting was not a success.



Lukas Bärfuss – once a homeless teenager, now a prominent writer
Photo: Keystone

Königin der Nacht – a short book about my mother
Lukas Bärfuss,
Rowohlt Verlag, 2026



They never saw each other again. Only now has he decided to write about her. In hard-hitting and at times crude language, Bärfuss expresses fury at the “treacherous slut” but then seeks to understand her actions. The book turns into a social critique and a true Bärfuss-style reckoning with Switzerland. For him, the story is a lesson in how destructive poverty can be. A lack of money breaks relationships, particularly in a country that measures a person’s worth by their assets. Bärfuss recounts how Switzerland once marginalised the poor – and tried to rein in women who wanted greater freedom. “Königin der Nacht” is already a bestseller in German-speaking Switzerland.

From homeless teenager to famous author – Bärfuss sees his life as a story of survival by sheer fortune. The feeling he had at the age of 15 when entering the deserted flat is key to his literature, he said in an interview. The ambivalence of that moment – footloose on the one hand, vulnerable on the other – offers a window into everything. “My mother made me into the writer I am today, although this was certainly not her intention.”

“There is a systemic gap in healthcare coverage”

Swiss who live in countries outside the EU/EFTA area often have inadequate health insurance. Centre politician and CSA member Elisabeth Schneider-Schneiter wants the federal government to do something about it. She says it is in Switzerland's interests for more expats to be treated in the country where they live.



INTERVIEW: EVELINE RUTZ

Parliament rejected your first motion in 2024. Why are you trying again?

Elisabeth Schneider-Schneiter: as a member of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) and a politician who works in foreign affairs and travels around the world, I can see that the problem has not gone away. Indeed, more and more elderly Swiss now live outside the EU/EFTA area. They no longer have mandatory health insurance cover and are unable to secure equivalent healthcare in their country of residence. Switzerland's Health Insurance Act, which dates back to the 1990s, fails to take account of this reality, which is why I am again proposing that expats be allowed to opt in to Swiss health insurance voluntarily.

Your original motion lost out by only six votes.

Yes, that's right. We didn't do enough lobbying in 2024. But here's the thing: I am not asking the Federal Council for ready-made solutions. All I want it to do is focus on the issue. The government owes it to those affected.

What new arguments will you use to convince your parliamentary colleagues?

There is a systemic gap in healthcare coverage – we are not merely talking about a few individual cases. Unfortunately, many National Councillors are unaware. I also want to put more emphasis on the economic arguments. People living abroad normally don't draw any supplementary benefits or rely on expensive care infra-

structure. This lessens the burden on our welfare system. If Swiss Abroad in non-EU/EFTA countries had proper health insurance, they would seek treatment locally even if their needs were complex.

Has the issue become more pressing?

Yes, it has. International mobility has increased. More and more people who emigrate do so because they struggle to live off their state pension in Switzerland. They move to places with a lower cost of living and cheaper healthcare, often after having paid into our system for decades. There are also growing numbers of people moving abroad to work for a few years.

What model do you envisage?

We still have to find one. There are various approaches; we need to analyse them and then define a clear framework. Who exactly should be entitled to health insurance? How much should policyholders pay? What benefits should be included? And how will the costs be spread? We want a fair solution that also works for health insurers. The idea is not simply to transplant the Swiss system to other countries.

Does this mean collaboration between the public and private sectors?

Yes. I have been speaking to health insurers, who agree that a legal framework is necessary.

How much money could Switzerland save if there were less medical tourism?

I don't have any official figures, but I hear physicians say that many Swiss Abroad return to Switzerland for expensive operations. After re-registering in the country, some depend on welfare assistance and claim supple-

National Councillor Elisabeth Schneider-Schneiter (Centre, Basel-Landschaft) wants Swiss Abroad in non-EU/EFTA countries to be able to opt in to Swiss health insurance voluntarily. Will her motion succeed at the second attempt? Photo: Keystone

“Swiss Abroad should not be treated as second-class citizens.”

mentary benefits. They leave Switzerland again as soon as their medical procedure is over.

Does no one know how many such cases there are?

No, because no one keeps track of them. What you can do is compare things like the price of medicine. Drugs cost significantly more or less depending on which country you are in. This is precisely the type of data that we need. It would be an important basis for any political debate. All the letters I receive relate to individual cases. I want to bring these cases into context and fundamentally improve the current system.

The Federal Council has always stressed that a person's place of residence dictates eligibility for health insurance.

The government should acknowledge that a different situation applies to Swiss Abroad. Other countries do. For example, the Caisse des Français de l'Étranger offers French expats the opportunity to take out voluntary cover while maintaining continuous rights to French social security. There is currently a lack of appreciation here in Switzerland of what is at stake. Not enough people know that access to public healthcare in countries like Thailand, Costa Rica, Brazil, or the Philippines is not automatically guaranteed.

Critics frame emigration as a voluntary choice against Swiss insurance. What is your view?

This is a flawed argument. If you have a Swiss passport, you can return to Switzerland for an expensive procedure at any time. People who are seriously ill choose to exercise this right. It is a strain on our system.

Has sentiment towards the Swiss Abroad deteriorated overall?

Yes, it has. I have been working on the CSA for the last 15 years and have noticed that the mood has turned. “If you move abroad, it's your own fault if your benefits are no longer covered” is a phrase I hear increasingly. This worries me. Broadly speaking, a “now it's my turn” attitude has become more prevalent. People forget that the 838,600 or so Swiss Abroad also have rights. Expats should not be treated as second-class citizens. Elderly people are leaving Switzerland because they can no longer afford to live there. They deserve a fair deal.

How likely do you think it is that your motion will succeed?

There are politicians in every party who are sensitive to the interests of the “Fifth Switzerland” – so I am confident. But it could still take months before they start debating the motion. What matters, I think, is that the issue remains on the political agenda.

If your motion were to fail, would the issue be off the table for you?

I will stay politically engaged and continue to talk to private health insurers. The authorities should provide more information, as I said before. Many expats underestimate how

Losing basic health cover

If you live in Switzerland, you must have health insurance in Switzerland – regardless of nationality or residence status. Anyone who moves abroad – except government employees or individuals posted abroad by their employer – loses this mandatory insurance cover.

Bilateral agreements mean that expats can often get equivalent healthcare coverage in EU and EFTA countries. The situation is trickier in non-EU/EFTA countries like Brazil or Thailand, where Swiss Abroad barely have any access to public healthcare. These expats have no other option but to take out private health insurance. Younger people without previous medical issues usually have no problem doing so. But insurers are wary if someone has already reached a certain age or has existing issues. They have little interest in taking on a new customer who could generate substantial healthcare costs. They will, in such cases, exclude certain benefits or reject an application outright. Generally, they will also adjust their premiums based on individual risk and have the right to terminate insurance policies at any time.

“Older Swiss Abroad, in particular, can be left in a desperate situation,” says the Centre Party National Councillor Elisabeth Schneider-Schneiter. Despite paying into a mandatory basic health insurance scheme for decades, many of them will no longer have adequate cover after leaving Switzerland. In the worst case, they can be refused medical treatment. “This goes against any notion of fairness.” Around 838,600 Swiss were living abroad at the end of 2025, of whom 357,063 were residents in countries outside the EU/EFTA area.

(ERU)

difficult and expensive it can be to get health insurance. Consulates and the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad also need to give advice.

A CSA working group has been looking at the issue for a long time. What is it currently doing?

We are thinking of commissioning our own study and are speaking to a number of universities. But ideally, it should be the government's job to get the facts right.

eCdC makes it easier to manage your administrative formalities from abroad

Every year, thousands of Swiss Abroad contact the Swiss Compensation Office about their pension benefits, first-pillar pension contributions, old-age and survivor's insurance (OASI), and disability insurance (DI). An online portal has now been set up to make this process easier.

ELODIE ZUFFEREY, CENTRAL COMPENSATION OFFICE CCO

People who have worked or lived in Switzerland and who now live abroad contact the Swiss Compensation Office (SCO) at different points in their lives, but especially when they reach retirement age and apply for an OASI pension. The SCO, which is a division of the Central Compensation Office handling first-pillar social insurance, is responsible for receiving OASI/DI contributions, calculating pension rights and paying out pension benefits.

Every month, the SCO pays out more than a million OASI/DI pensions around the world, including around 150,000 to Swiss people living mostly in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the US. Although the Swiss

The portal is
also geared to
future pensioners.

Abroad represent only a relatively modest share (15 percent) of SCO beneficiaries, they alone generate almost one quarter of the administrative requests received every year (123,000 in 2025), whether these requests are for an account statement, for information on upcoming payments or to transmit documents.

Requests submitted by post or email involve multiple steps. Often, forms must be printed out and filled in before being sent. Once requests are received by the SCO, they are sorted and sent to the appropriate department for processing. These steps can take a certain amount of time, particularly if any information is missing or needs to be checked with the insured person.



Since its launch three years ago, eCdC has amassed over 17,000 users worldwide. Photo Artem Varnitsin – stock.adobe.com

The eCdC portal and e-services make formalities simpler

To make your administrative formalities easier, an online eCdC portal and various e-services, set out in the box, are available.

Below is an overview of the latest e-services developed, which are accessible to anyone without the need to create a user account or register.

■ Request a benefits statement with just a few clicks

Recipients of OASI/DI pensions living abroad sometimes need a benefits statement for the purposes of administrative formalities in the country where they live. Requests for these statements can now be made via eCdC, where they will be transmitted directly to the department responsible without any intermediary stages.

■ Reporting a death is now quicker

Reporting the death of a person drawing an OASI/DI pension paid out by the SCO is another procedure accessible to anyone via eCdC. When you transmit information via the online platform, it is fed directly into the system, and the payment of the pension is automatically halted. Automating the process in this way means that the situation can be acknowledged more quickly, which saves loved ones any additional formalities.

■ Preparing for retirement from abroad

The new eCdC portal is not only for people who are already drawing a pension but also for future pensioners. Finding out the provisional amount of your pension in order to be able to plan your retirement is one example.

Next year, it will be possible to ask for this directly via eCdC, where the information will be gathered in a precise and structured manner to avoid constant toing and froing between the insured person and the case officer, thus speeding up the process.

eCdC: a portal dedicated to insured persons

In line with the Swiss Confederation's digitalisation strategy, the SCO launched eCdC in December 2022 for optional OASI/DI pensions, then in December 2023 for recipients of OASI/DI benefits abroad. eCdC has now been in operation for three years and has over 17,000 users around the world. The online portal means insured persons can be more independent and carry out their administrative formalities more quickly and whenever they like.

The aim of developing the eCdC is two-fold: to make the portal accessible to a greater number of people, and thus to promote the use of digital services.

eCdC portal/e-services:
www.revue.link/cco



eCdC and e-services at a glance

The Swiss Compensation Office (SCO) and the DI Office for insured persons living abroad (OAIE) provide e-services and an online portal for persons based abroad.

Online e-services with no account required

To complete your formalities quickly, anywhere in the world and without having to register:

- Request an individual account statement
- Obtain a benefits statement
- Order an OASI card
- Request a foreign pension
- Report a death

Online eCdC portal with a personal account

Create an account and log in to access the following services:

- A For recipients of an OASI/DI pension:
- View your benefits
 - Find out about upcoming payments
 - Submit your academic certificates
 - Change your address*

*If you are changing address, please also notify the competent Swiss representation (embassy or consulate) for your place of residence. Any changes of address reported via the eCdC portal will not be passed on to your Swiss representation.

- B For persons affiliated to optional OASI/DI:

- Declare your income and your wealth
- Submit your supporting documents
- Change your address

Federal votes

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

The Federal Council decided at its session on 24 June 2026 to submit the following proposals to the people on 29 November 2026:

- Federal Decree of 19 June 2026 on Additional OASI Funding through an Increase in VAT (BBI 2026 1757)
- Federal Popular Initiative "For restrictions on fireworks" (BBI 2026 1760)
- Federal Popular Initiative "Yes to fair federal taxes for married couples – to finally end discrimination against marriage!" (BBI 2026 1758)
- Amendment of 19 December 2025 to the Federal Act on War Materiel (WMA) (BBI 2026 22)

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 VoteInfo app.



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 Switzerland's digital security" (BBI 2026 1424) (2 December 2027)
- Federal Popular Initiative "For a transparent state to strengthen trust in the authorities (Trust Initiative)" (BBI 2026 1600) (16 December 2027)
- Federal Popular Initiative "For a fair and sustainable public transport policy (Free public transport initiative)" (BBI 2026 1678) (23 December 2027)

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



Two adventure-packed weeks together

Both two-week summer camps in St Stephan in the Bernese Alps provided unforgettable moments, enriching encounters, and a wealth of adventure, giving teenagers from the "Fifth Switzerland" the chance to deepen their connection to Switzerland.



Leading the hike with a smile. Photo: Lorenzo Commergnat

MICHEL GERBER, HEAD OF THE YOUTH SERVICE

After travelling together from Zurich to St Stephan, participants set up camp at their base, familiarising themselves with the most important rules and engaging in activities to get to know each other better. A varied mix of sport, games, workshops and excursions awaited them in the ensuing days. This included a workshop on Swiss culture as well as sports tournaments, team challenges, a cooking competition and numerous creative evenings, e.g. film evening, karaoke, casino night, and a disco.

The participants also ventured further afield. They visited the Cailler chocolate factory and the Gruyère region, went on an excursion to Thun and Interlaken, and enjoyed various outdoor activities like hiking, map and compass training, and orienteering.

A key part of the two camps, which were run by the Youth Service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, was about sharing experiences and strengthening team spirit. By taking part in

group activities, meeting people of different nationalities, and overcoming challenges together, participants learned how to take responsibility and work together and made new friends.

Besides the various activities, participants also acquainted themselves with day-to-day camp life. Daily routines like doing chores, keeping the camp tidy and having regular briefings promoted self-reliance and contributed to a happy environment.

Blending adventure, sport, creativity and community, the 2026 St Stephan summer camps were rich experiences offering many new discoveries and lasting memories.



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Memories and friendships that resonate far beyond summer

Summer has been and gone. The SJAS holiday camp participants are back home, and life has calmed down a little back at SJAS headquarters – as we reminisce about the shared adventures, new friendships and many passing moments that made summer 2026 so special.

RAYA KELLER

Ask participants about their favourite experiences during the SJAS holiday camps, and they will recount the hikes they went on, the Swiss cities they discovered, the lakes they swam in, and the night they slept in a tent. It is often the simple things that live long in the memory. “I will miss the Swiss outdoors the most,” says 14-year-old Rocco.

The main thing on holiday camps is the new friends you make. Eva, 14, says she met many people she wants to stay in touch with: “Everyone comes from different cultures. Getting to know and learning from each other is exciting.”

Many past visitors to Switzerland on SJAS holiday camps now work as camp leaders. Making this transition was a no-brainer for Luna, 18: “The camps were life-changing experiences for me.” Many of the friendships made back then are still going strong. “We still meet, either in Switzerland or in our home countries,” says José, 18.



A bit of wellness – cucumber slices included. Photo: Noah Rüegge

The diversity of camp life is also evident behind the scenes. “It is incredibly enriching to have this vibrant mix consisting of children on the one hand and camp leaders on the other, all coming from a range of backgrounds and speaking different languages,” says Meret, 26, who cooks the camp food and is particularly fond of the washing-up parties: “Turning up the music and washing up with the children is always fun.” Dominic, 28: “It’s lovely to see children communicating with each other in all languages.”

Swiss Trip, in particular, exemplifies the enormous effort that goes into organising every holiday camp. “The trip involves a huge amount of logistical work,” says main leader Nicola, 28. “You’re on the move a lot and want to spend enough time at every stop. Houses also have to be constantly prepared, then cleaned and returned. We accommodate a wide range of cultures and customs, which makes for a really lovely

and exciting SJAS summer. But it can also be demanding.”

From cooking, to travelling, to gathering around the campfire – the SJAS holiday camps are all about experiences that bring people together. It is precisely these memories that participants take home with them. Making friends with other kids around the world, gaining new perspectives, and feeling part of a large community of Swiss Abroad – much of this will last far beyond summer.

A 20-minute Swiss television report on the SJAS holiday camps and their history: www.revue.link/srfsjas

Stiftung für junge Auslandschweizer:innen
Fondation pour les enfants suisses à l'étranger
Fondazione per la gioventù svizzera all'estero
Foundation for young Swiss Abroad

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Rafting from Thun to Bern. Photo Raya Keller

The Swiss Abroad spend the SwissCommunity Days in Brunnen at the end of August

Over one hundred Swiss from all over the world got together at the end of August in Brunnen on the shores of Lake Lucerne for the SwissCommunity Days. The centrepiece of the event was the meeting of the Council of the Swiss Abroad, the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”.

SMILLA SCHÄR

The second edition of the SwissCommunity Days took place in August. This event supplements the Congress of the Swiss Abroad, which will now be held only every four years in its traditional format. The centrepiece of the SwissCommunity Days is the meeting of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”. The meeting is part of a broader programme, which this year comprised a workshop on Thursday and an outing and party for everyone on Saturday.

The Council of the Swiss Abroad focused on organisational matters

This year’s edition of the SwissCommunity Days mainly involved addressing internal organisational issues and questions. Many of the Council of the Swiss Abroad delegates met for a workshop on the Thursday. They drew on the broad knowledge of the council members from all over the world to brainstorm and generate ideas for the future of the online community platform SwissCommunity and for how to raise funds for the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.

A raft of institutional and organisational issues remained on the agenda when the CSA convened on Friday. The delegates approved the 2025 annual report and the legislative goals for the legislative body from 2025–2029. In addition, there were many proposals by the delegates relating to such issues as governance and the structure of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad plus its various organs. Refreshment breaks and spectacular views of a rainy Lake Lucerne offered respite from the rather dry subject material.

Visits by the Consular Directorate and Federal Chancellery

On Friday, the CSA delegates also had the opportunity to address their questions directly to experts from the Federal Adminis-



Participating and contributing: scene from the workshop on Thursday during the brainstorming session on the future of OSA offerings. Photo: Andy Ramseier

tration. Oliver Spycher from the Federal Chancellery provided an update on the e-voting test run. Notwithstanding the regrettable incident in Basel-Stadt, other cantons have started conducting tests – most recently the canton of Lucerne and in November the canton of Neuchâtel for the first time. The Confederation and cantons aim to evaluate the trials by 2028 and then decide whether to make e-voting standard procedure, or whether to continue or halt the trials.

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) was also represented. Marianne Jenni, Director-General of the Consular Directorate, fielded questions from the Swiss Abroad in attendance. She reported on the work and different ongoing projects at the Consular Directorate. She also provided an initial insight into a new offering scheduled to go live next year: the consular online counter. This digital counter is equipped for a wide range of administrative procedures, thus simplifying dealings with official bodies for Swiss Abroad.

Closing party on the Square for the Swiss Abroad

The close of the SwissCommunity Days on Saturday featured the usual informal gathering. Dinner was served on a boat on Lake Lucerne and everyone had plenty of scope to mingle. The Swiss Abroad then visited the finissage of the artist in residence programme of the Place of the Swiss Abroad in Brunnen and celebrated the last day on their special square, which is a symbol of the connection between the Swiss Abroad and Switzerland. The artist in residence programme gives a creative artist who is a member of the Swiss Abroad a one-year residency in Switzerland. This year’s residency was awarded to sculptor Vincent Ineichen.

Some of the photo highlights from the “SwissCommunity Days” can be viewed in the online version of this article. www.revue.ch/en

From an apprenticeship to a degree in Engineering

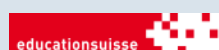
Having grown up as a Swiss Abroad in Burgundy, Lukas Gretener found himself caught between two worlds for a long time: in France, he was “le Suisse”; in Switzerland, “the Frenchman”. At the age of 18, he decided to return to Switzerland to begin a carpentry apprenticeship. In the process, he learned a trade and discovered his passion for wood as a material. After several years of professional experience, the next step was a degree in wood technology at the Bern University of Applied Sciences. There, he learned to design and develop structural systems, buildings, furniture, and wood-based products and processes. Today, Gretener works in Berne as an engineer with a Bachelor of Science degree in wood technology. (RVG)



Lukas Gretener's next dream: to become a mountain guide. Photo provided

Discover how he found his path – and how he combines his passion for nature and technology here: www.revue.link/wood

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



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Important notice to our readers

The December issue of the “Swiss Review” has been cancelled

Dear readers,

Walter Schmid, the new OSA Head of Communications and Editor-in-Chief of the “Swiss Review”, has unfortunately been absent since July due to illness. We wish him a continued speedy recovery. However, the OSA Executive Board – in its capacity as publisher of the “Swiss Review” – has decided to seek a successor for this crucial role. Communication is fundamental to our organisation, and the “Swiss Review” is its main channel.

The search for a suitable successor will, however, take some time. Thanks to the tremendous support of several individuals, the October issue was produced despite the difficult staffing situation. We would like to thank everyone involved most sincerely for their extraordinary commitment. However, this interim solution cannot be continued for the forthcoming issue, and a short-term alternative that could ensure the necessary editorial quality and accountability is not currently available.

The editorial meeting for the December issue was due to take place on 10 September and was initially postponed due to this situation. After carefully examining the options, the majority of the Executive Board has now



Daniel Hunziker and Filippo Lombardi. Photomontage: RH

decided, with a heavy heart, to cancel the planned December issue.

We deeply regret this extraordinary step and ask our loyal readers for their understanding. At the same time, we are working flat out to put in place the staffing arrangements necessary for the future of the “Swiss Review”. We would like to wish you a happy New Year already and look forward to continuing the “Swiss Review” with renewed vigour as soon as possible.

Your Organisation of the Swiss Abroad

*Filippo Lombardi, President
Daniel Hunziker, Director*

Preparations for the Youth Service's 2027 summer camps are already in full swing!

All the information about the camps and how to register will soon be available online. Scan the QR code and stay up to date!



the ticket

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