

SWISS REVIEW

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad
February 2021

**How long since Switzerland's women
got the vote? 100, 75 or just 50 years?**

**Rainforest man Bruno Manser –
a momentous life portrayed on the big screen**

**Cooking up a storm – how Betty Bossi
became a fixture in Swiss kitchens**

RENDEZ-VOUS MIT DER SCHWEIZ

Pünktlich um 5!



Die App für Schweizerinnen
und Schweizer im Ausland



BACK TO OUR ROOTS WITH TISSOT,
"INNOVATORS BY TRADITION".

The Tissot story began in Le Locle, Switzerland, in 1853. Today, Tissot is the leading traditional Swiss watchmaker by volume. The brand is proud of its roots and has positioned itself as an ambassador abroad, representing values it holds dear, like tradition and innovation. Throughout its history, Tissot has put this dual stamp on all its products.

By registering on the SwissCommunity network, Tissot thanks you, dear Swiss Abroad, ambassadors of our country all over the world, by offering you a 15% discount on the entire collection on its official website.

www.swisscommunity.org/tissot - Official website | Tissot (tissotwatches.com)



Organisation of
the Swiss Abroad

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad reinvents itself

- new website
- new online community
- new online presence for «Swiss Review»
- new design
- all-in-one

Visit our new website www.SwissCommunity.org and join our new community to forge strong and lasting links with other Swiss people from all over the world.

Our partners:



Swiss Travel System.



SWI swissinfo.ch

Delayed democracy

4 Focus

The belated advent of women's suffrage 50 years ago

8 Images

Caran d'Ache – from small pencil factory to global brand

10 Report

Mitholz – mountain village and ticking time bomb

13 Literature

How Germaine de Staël infuriated Napoleon Bonaparte

14 Society

Betty Bossi – the cook who is found in every Swiss kitchen

News from your region

17 Politics

The Responsible Business Initiative – popular but unsuccessful

A controversial alternative to the password jungle

20 Profile

On the big screen – Bruno Manser's rainforest crusade

22 Covid-19 pandemic

Second wave hits Switzerland hard

24 SwissCommunity

The big verdict – results of the "Swiss Review" reader survey

29 Mailbag

31 News



Hanna Sahlfeld-Singer is a Swiss Abroad. The 77-year-old, who lives in Germany, says she takes part in every federal vote – honouring time and again the legacy that she herself helped to create. Sahlfeld-Singer is one of the many women who campaigned tirelessly for women's suffrage in Switzerland. She was also one of the first handful of women ever to be elected to the National Council 50 years ago. The cover of this edition of "Swiss Review" captures Sahlfeld-Singer's big moment in 1971, when she swore an oath to the constitution under the mighty dome of the Federal Palace. A telling anecdote: the freshly elected member of parliament had difficulty getting to the ceremony in the first place, as she was initially told to use the visitors' entrance.

Everyone else got there before us, be it Australia (women's suffrage since 1902), Azerbaijan (1918), Albania (1920), the Central African Republic (1946), or Cyprus (1960). Why did Switzerland of all countries – one of the world's oldest democracies – insist on excluding half of its population, i.e. women, from political life for so long? Both world wars triggered natural social upheaval in other countries. However, men in Switzerland long continued to believe that giving women the right to vote was reckless, unnecessary and even went against the natural order. The male half of the country simply refused to budge, suggests the historian quoted in this edition's Focus article.

On another important but completely different topic, the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has hit Switzerland hard. People normally get together during the festive season. Not in 2020. Tens of thousands of Swiss Abroad were unable to visit friends, family and old haunts in their country of origin over Christmas. The only way to catch up was by video call, as we were once again reminded that the wonders of technology are no substitute for a roomful of actual human beings.

On another important but completely different topic, the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has hit Switzerland hard. People normally get together during the festive season. Not in 2020. Tens of thousands of Swiss Abroad were unable to visit friends, family and old haunts in their country of origin over Christmas. The only way to catch up was by video call, as we were once again reminded that the wonders of technology are no substitute for a roomful of actual human beings.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

PS: The online version of "Swiss Review" has been repackaged and is now available via the [swisscommunity.org](https://www.swisscommunity.org) information platform. From now on, the revamped [swisscommunity.org](https://www.swisscommunity.org) website will also house all other content produced by our publisher, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad. Furthermore, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad itself will appear increasingly under the "SwissCommunity" label in future.

Cover photo: The swearing-in of National Councillor Hanna Sahlfeld-Singer before the Federal Assembly on 13 December 1971. Photo: Keystone

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

**Swiss
Community**

It was no accident that women's suffrage came late to Switzerland

It was only 50 years ago in 1971 that Swiss women gained the right to vote and stand for election – after a century of campaigning. Hanna Sahlfeld-Singer was one of the first women elected to the federal parliament. “It was a marathon, not a sprint,” recalls the former National Councillor, who now lives abroad.

SUSANNE WENGER

The exact date on which Swiss women became fully fledged citizens of their own country was 7 February 1971. It was on this day that a momentous referendum saw the female population gain the right to vote and stand for election at the federal level.

In other words, women could now participate in elections and popular votes, run for parliament, and sign petitions for referendums and popular initiatives. Notably, men decided that this could happen, because they alone had exercised full political rights until then. Women had been denied the right to vote and stand for election ever since the creation of the federal Swiss state in 1848.

In 1959, most of Switzerland's men wanted to keep politics exclusively male, with almost 70 per cent voting against women's suffrage at the federal level. But the floodgates opened twelve years later. “We are not asking you, we are telling you!” announced Emilie Lieberherr at a large rally on Berne's Bundesplatz (Lieberherr would later become a member of the Council of States for the canton of Zurich). Two thirds of Swiss men obliged by voting yes. The first-ever national elections with female participation took place as early as autumn 1971. Eleven female National Councillors and one female member of the Council of States were “honourably elected”, said the weekly newsreel.

The story of a pioneer

Two of these female pioneers are still alive: Gabrielle Nanchen from Valais and Hanna Sahlfeld-Singer from the canton of St. Gallen – both from the Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP). Hanna Sahlfeld-Singer now lives in her hus-

band's home country, Germany. When she was elected to the National Council, Sahlfeld-Singer, a qualified theologian, was 28 and the mother of a one-year-old child. “My first day in parliament was exciting,” says the now 77-year-old. On entering the Federal Palace for the first time, she was told to use the visitors' entrance. She can laugh about it now. However, the anecdote shows how much opposition she had to overcome.

She was a woman pastor with the Reformed Church who wanted to make a difference in politics. On top of that, she was a working mother married to a foreigner. “This was too much for many people.” In 1970, Sahlfeld-Singer made speeches on Swiss National Day calling for women's suffrage. They caused quite a stir. Criticism rained down, but not necessarily on her. “People knew that I would not be swayed.” Her husband, himself a church minister, was on the receiving end instead. But her spouse always supported her.

Forced to give up her church duties

Hanna and Rolf Sahlfeld wanted to share parenting and work responsibilities – an approach that broke the mould. However, Sahlfeld-Singer, who came from a working-class family, had to give up her church position in order to take up her role as National Councillor. That was what the law said – a relic from cultural struggles between church and state. She says it was a ruling aimed at Catholic priests. “For a hundred years, no one thought it would be of relevance to a young lady like me.” To ensure that she could work in Berne, Sahlfeld-Singer played the pastor's wife instead – a role that is traditionally unpaid. As National Councillor, Sahlfeld-Singer fought for such issues as bet-





ter social security for women and reducing the speed limit on roads.

Sahlfeld-Singer had an indirect impact outside the chamber simply by virtue of the fact that women were now entering parliament. She had her second child in 1972 – the first-ever National Councillor to give birth while in office. The press covered the story, mentioning that her children were not Swiss citizens on account of their foreign father. Sahlfeld-Singer herself had had to apply to remain Swiss when she was married. This discrimination against women affected many binational families. The ruling was abolished in 1978. “After that, many Swiss women living abroad could also make their children Swiss citizens,” she says.

“Both novel and audacious”

Switzerland, Portugal and Liechtenstein were the last European countries to give women political rights. Germany introduced women’s suffrage in 1918, France in 1944 – towards the end of a world war in both cases. Switzerland, spared the convulsions of war, imposed the referendum hurdle instead. Yet this does not completely explain why it took so long for one of the world’s oldest democracies to

give women the vote. In her 2020 book “Jeder Frau ihre Stimme”, historian Caroline Arni argues that women in Switzerland were deliberately deprived of political rights, and that this status quo was reinforced time and again. “This was no accident,” she writes.

Political scientist Werner Seitz believes that Switzerland’s “male chauvinist culture” had a part to play, influenced by the old myths and legends surrounding the nation’s founding fathers. An entrenched idea of gender roles riddled all social classes too – as lawyer Emilie Kempin-Spyri found out to her dismay back in 1887 when she was

Hanna Sahlfeld-Singer on her first day in the National Council – with SP member of the Council of States Matthias Eggenberger (lighting up) and SP National Councillor Rolf Weber in attendance.

Archive photo: Keystone, 1971



Half a century later – a round of applause for Hanna Sahlfeld-Singer in the National Council chamber during a special event devoted to women.

Archive photo: Keystone, 2019

The striking motif of a carpet beater. A campaign poster from the 1947 Zurich referendum on women's suffrage.

Photo: Keystone



Argument from the Yes camp – “A free people need free women” (1946)

Zurich Museum of Design, poster collection



unable to work as a judge because she lacked full civil rights. Kempin-Spyri took her case to the Federal Supreme Court – and lost. She argued that the constitution's provisions on suffrage also pertained to women. The presiding judges called this reasoning “both novel and audacious”.

A personal price to pay

At the turn of the 20th century, more and more women – and men – began campaigning for women's suffrage. The government in Berne was slow to act, while certain cantons took matters into their own hands. Social change at the end of the 1960s finally brought the matter to a head at the federal level. In 1990, Appenzell Innerrhoden became the last canton to introduce women's suffrage, on the order of the Federal Supreme Court.

“Again, it was a marathon, not a sprint,” says Sahlfeld-Singer, who was emphatically re-elected in 1975 but later resigned. Sahlfeld-Singer's husband was no longer able to find work in eastern Switzerland because of his wife's political career. The family left Switzerland and made a new start near Cologne. Sahlfeld-Singer is one of the women who blazed a trail for future generations of female politicians in Berne. Commemorative plaques today adorn their old seats in parliament. “Our fight was worth it,” she concludes, even if she and her husband paid their own personal price. People now take equality for granted in many areas of life, she adds. “But women must hang on to what they have achieved, otherwise they may lose it again.”

More information on 50 years of women's suffrage in Switzerland:
www.ch2021.ch

Women with a foot in the political door

It is 50 years since women in Switzerland were first entitled to vote and stand for election. Female political participation is growing, but a little more effort is necessary to ensure a proper gender balance.

EVA HIRSCHI

Some 84 women were elected to the National Council in 2019 – 20 more than in 2015. This is the biggest increase since the introduction of women's suffrage in 1971. At 42 per cent, female representation in the National Council has never been as high. In the Council of States, where the female contingent had been dwindling over the previous 12 years, the proportion of women climbed to a record 26 per cent. “This sends a strong message and was well overdue,” says Kathrin Bertschy, Green Liberal National Councillor for the canton of Berne. “It reflects a new zeitgeist, of which the women's strike was symptomatic.” Bertschy is co-chair of alliance f, a cross-party umbrella organisation of women's associations that are campaigning for better gender balance in parliament. Alliance f is behind the “Helvetia ruft” campaign, which aims to help more women get into politics.

“Not only have we urged political parties and those responsible for nominating candidates to put women on party lists where they have good chances, but we have also organised workshops and mentoring programmes for female candidates,” explains Flavia Kleiner, co-initiator of “Helvetia ruft”. “It is not about achieving fairness, it is about accurately reflecting Switzerland's demographics. Women account for half of our population after all.”

Catching up on 170 years

But why has it taken 50 years for parliament to suddenly become noticeably more female? “Men have had a 170-year head start, while women have been trying to play catch-up,” says Kleiner. “So we need a little time.” Swiss politics has been a man's world until now, says Bertschy: “When they gave women the right to vote, they forgot to ensure that we were adequately represented to the same extent as the cantons and the language regions are in the National Council. But the Confederation does love dealing in quotas – I tick one of their boxes as a woman from Berne.”

However, not only have women been poorly represented in parliament for a long time, but there has traditionally been a dearth of female candidates. Flavia Kleiner believes that societal constraints are the main factor hindering female involvement. “It is not easy to reconcile a political career with family life. Meetings and events often take place in the evening or at weekends. In addition, Swiss political culture is still male-dominated with its attendant rough and tumble. And then we have the media, who are less forgiving towards women.”

With political office therefore less of a draw for women, more of an effort is needed to convince would-be candidates to put themselves forward, says Sarah Bütikofer, a political scientist who is conducting a study on female political participation. Bütikofer believes that political parties are best placed to act: “Switzerland’s political parties are organised along cantonal lines. They have the power to put women’s names forward on promising party lists.”

Anyone who wants to be elected to the National Council or the Council of States normally needs experience at cantonal level. Very few people are catapulted directly into the federal parliament. “It is in the national arena where a party’s political leaders are active,” says Bütikofer. “Hence, women must be given opportunities at cantonal and municipal level, so that we have a conveyor belt of female politicians who are ready for higher office.”

Too cautious? Or less confident?

Yet, it is precisely at cantonal level where Switzerland is still a long way from achieving gender equality. In 2019, women accounted for 25 to 29 per cent of politicians in the cantonal parliaments. Basel-Stadt managed to increase the proportion of females in its cantonal parliament to 42 per cent at the end of October 2020. But meanwhile Aargau again elected a cantonal government comprised exclusively of men. The proportion of women in Aargau’s cantonal parliament even fell.

For Martina Sigg, leader of the FDP women’s group in Aargau, this is an unsatisfactory state of affairs. “We are actually finding it quite hard to recruit women in some districts of Aargau,” she says. “Women are a lot more cautious and less sure of their political abilities. We often have to make the first contact and persuade them ourselves. They rarely come to us.” Which is why Sigg believes campaigns like “Helvetia ruft” are important. However, when Jean-Pierre Gallati from the SVP and Yvonne Feri from the SP

faced each other in an election run-off for the Aargau cantonal government in 2019, Sigg voted for the male candidate. “The SVP were entitled to the seat, plus I think Gallati was better suited for the job. Voting along party or gender lines – which is more important? Party lines in my view. But I would naturally have been very happy if the SVP had nominated an able female candidate.”

Non-party politics

Standing for election is one thing, voting is another. Swiss women have tended to be slightly reluctant voters. According to the Swiss Election Study (Selects), there was a 49 per cent turnout among male voters in the 2019 federal elections. Female voter turnout was only 41 per cent.

Could it be that women are turned off by the institutionalised nature of politics? After all, the 2019 woman’s strike, which saw hundreds of thousands of female protesters take to the streets, showed that women are more than willing to speak up when they want. Lisa Gafner: “I took part in the women’s strike myself. For the past two years, I have also been involved in the EKdM [Eidgenössische Kommission dini Mueter] – a pressure group that we set up after the women’s strike to get a better deal for working mothers.”

Gafner, 38, has consciously decided not to join any political party. “I have no wish to get drawn into petty infighting, personality cults, or toeing the party line. The issues are what matter to me.” Gafner’s pressure group is lobbying on these issues. “What the EKdM is doing is one thing. But run for a political office? Never. A structured environment like that has no appeal. And it would be too hard to reconcile work and family life.”

National Councillor Kathrin Bertschy is in favour of alternative forms of political participation. Nevertheless, she adds: “It is important that women are represented in parliament instead of just leaving the decisions to men. Because parliament is where women can bring about the most change by improving the legislation and parameters that matter.”



Flavia Kleiner says that women are playing catch-up: “Men have had a 170-year head start.”



Katrin Bertschy on the increasing proportion of women in parliament: “This sends a strong message and was well overdue.”



Sarah Bütikofer: “The political parties have the power to put women’s names forward.”



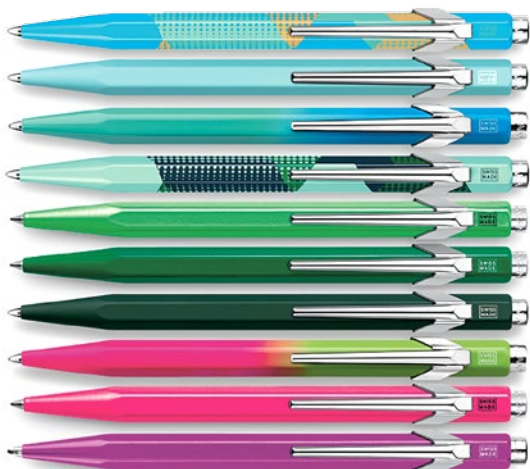
The Neocolor wax pastel crayon was brought to market in 1952. Artist Pablo Picasso soon began using it for his sketches. (CdA company archive)

From small pencil factory to global brand

“Hopefully every Swiss living abroad will soon be using Swiss Caran d’Ache pencils to support the economy back home,” wrote the “Correspondenzblatt für die Schweizer und Schweizervereine im Auslande” in 1925. Geneva-based pencil manufacturer Caran d’Ache – still a fledgling company in those days – had just opened a shop in Berlin. This was the beginning of a success story that saw Swiss writing and colouring products become a global hit. Freelance author Ralph Brühwiler tells the story of Caran d’Ache in a new, lavishly illustrated book. His evocatively written chronicle contains a wealth of facts and details. Company founder Arnold Schweitzer, an industrialist from eastern Switzerland, features prominently – Brühwiler describing him as a kindly businessman who experienced his fair share of setbacks. The author also explains why the company name transliterates the Russian for pencil, how the company’s laboratories and workshops became a conveyor belt for new products, and why Caran d’Ache pencils are just as popular among Swiss school children as they are among famous artists. Caran d’Ache is a global brand these days, and is still owned by three Swiss families.

SUSANNE WENGER

“Die Caran d’Ache Saga. Von Genf in die Welt.”
(The Caran d’Ache Saga – the story of a global Genevan brand)
NZZ Libro 2020 (in German), 264 pages; CHF 49



“A contemporary writing fashion statement” – the ballpoint pen that came to be known as 849 from the 1960s onwards. (CdA company archive)



Caran d’Ache developed the Prismo watercolour colouring pencil in the 1930s. The cases containing multicoloured rows of pencils were popular among generations of Swiss children. (RB)



Pencil rocket – Caran d’Ache went on an advertising offensive at the end of 1920s. (CdA company archive)



The iconic Caran d’Ache pencil-sharpening machine was a common feature in Swiss school classrooms during the post-war years. (CdA company archive)



Caran d’Ache patented the Fixpencil in 1930. This new form of mechanical pencil was particularly popular among technical illustrators. (CdA company archive)



The Ecridor – millions of these luxurious hexagonal pens were sold from 1953. (CdA company archive)

The most explosive place in Switzerland

For over 70 years, Mitholz in the Bernese Oberland has been home to a mountain bunker containing thousands of tonnes of live ammunition dating back to the Second World War. Now the bombshell: the armoury needs to be cleared and the village residents evacuated. Will Mitholz become a ghost town?

JÜRIG STEINER

The chalet-style houses bask serenely in the winter sun that illuminates a narrow valley floor flanked by steep mountains on both sides. Mitholz, a village with 200 inhabitants, is situated on a level stretch of the Kander Valley. It has one remaining restaurant, but its last local shop closed for good a long time ago.

Winding their way through Mitholz are the railway line and the road leading to the Lötschberg tunnel car train that takes passengers to Valais. This Alpine village is no stranger to natural perils such as rockslides, landslides, floods and avalanches. “We are used to natural hazards,” says Roman Lanz, mayor of the Kandergrund municipality that encompasses Mitholz. “We have never seen them as a reason to move away.”

But is Mitholz too dangerous for its residents? This question suddenly arose two years ago. And the matter was deadly serious. The reason is that located deep in the cliffs overlooking the village thousands of tonnes of live munitions – including 50-kilo aircraft bombs – remain in a partially collapsed Second World War weapons depot.

Tragedy hit Mitholz in 1947, when three violent explosions occurred in the depot one night just before Christmas, not long after the underground facility had been built. Debris rained from the sky, as munitions, mountain rocks and pressurised air blasted out of the entrances to the depot, destroying much of the village. Nine people died in one of the biggest accidents in Swiss army history.



Higher, further, faster, more beautiful?

In search of the somewhat different Swiss records. This edition: A visit to the most explosive place in Switzerland.

The villagers returned to their houses just one year later, although the cause of the explosions remains unclear to this day, as journalist Hans Rudolf Schneider explains in his book “Die Schreckensnacht von Mitholz” (Horror in Mitholz). Despite this, the authorities announced in the 1940s that the damaged depot, in which around half of the original 7,000 tonnes of munitions still lie buried, no longer presented a danger to the local population.

This view changed when army commanders began toying with the idea of building a secret data centre in

the underground facility. A new report in summer 2018 said that the risk to roads, housing, rail infrastructure, and, by extension, to people was now “unacceptable”. Mitholz suddenly became Switzerland’s most explosive village.

According to the Kandergrund mayor, Roman Lanz, the village was plunged into a state of paralysis after hearing the news in June 2018. It took another one and a half years for Federal Councillor Viola Amherd to announce that the only way to nullify the danger was to clear the ammunition. She said it would be a highly



Debris in the village after the 1947 explosions – nine people died and many houses were destroyed.

Archive photo: Keystone, 1947



complex operation involving robots – the first operation of its kind anywhere in the world. However, this will increase the detonation risk to such an extent that the 170 inhabitants will have to be evacuated from their village for around ten years, starting in 2031. The whole exercise will cost one billion Swiss francs.

“Mitholz, the ghost town.” The news came like a bombshell. Lanz, who works as a manager at a car body repair business, was suddenly giving interviews to foreign television stations and attending meetings with federal councillors in his capacity as mayor. Mitholz was on everyone’s lips. “But the people I talk to here in the village still find it hard to grasp,” says Lanz. “It’s almost surreal to them.” Mitholz residents live just as near to the depot as they did before.

But now these people have an uncertain future ahead of them. Their

livelihoods are on the line. Lanz stands in front of the reinforced northern entrance to the depot, where ammunition and explosives used to be transported into the depths of the cliff by rail. Just a stone’s throw away is a farmhouse. It belongs to the Künzi family, who rear cattle on the slopes surrounding the depot. For decades, they have been farming land that is now supposed to be in the danger zone. You cannot just decamp from one place to another with cows. The Künzis will have to build a completely new life somewhere else.

Lanz is in touch with locals like the Künzis practically every day. “Few people from outside the village will appreciate what the past two years have been like for us since they announced the news.” He explains that reality has been slow to dawn on some residents, who still hope

Samuel Künzi’s farm is situated on a rocky ledge. Thousands of tonnes of old ordnance are buried in the rocks below.

Photo: Danielle Liniger

that the government will decide not to spend so much money after all and everything will remain the same.

Emotions are one thing, money is another. What about compensation? What will the value be of houses that are likely to be left to the army during the evacuation period, then possibly



The news was “hard to grasp” and “almost surreal” for many people in the village, says mayor Roman Lanz.

Photo: Danielle Liniger

returned to their former owners after standing empty for years?

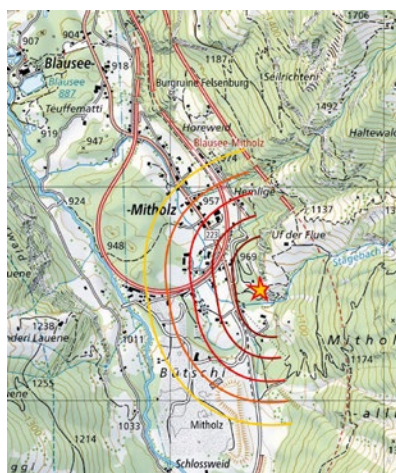
And, of course, the elephant in the room: why is so much dangerous ammunition stored near a village where people live? “Connected by railway, the Mitholz munitions store was in an ideal location for implementing Switzerland’s redoubt strategy in the Second World War,” says historian and former professor at the Military Academy at ETH Zurich, Rudolf Jaun. In summer 1940, General Henri Guisan decided to move most of his troops back into the Alpine interior. This was where the main front would be after delaying actions to keep any invading force out of the Central Plateau were exhausted. Munitions were stockpiled in a number of secret armouries including Mitholz. It was from Mitholz that weapons would have been supplied to the southern front in Valais.

This never transpired. Not a single shot was fired in anger with weapons from the Mitholz cache. On the contrary, depots like Mitholz were used after the war as a convenient place to dump unused ammunition. The Mitholz store, built before the Second



The Mitholz depot has an inconspicuous entrance but has been a ticking time bomb for decades.

Photo: Danielle Liniger



The Mitholz munitions store is situated in direct proximity to houses, roads and a busy railway line.

Reproduced by permission of the Federal Office of Topography, swisstopo (BA200186)

World War to protect the population, ironically became a ticking time bomb.

Before we criticise, we need to realise that people viewed the armed forces differently back then, says military historian Jaun. “No one had any quibbles about the army doing what it did.” People took risks as a necessity. For example, thousands of tonnes of defective or unwanted ammunition were openly discarded in Lake Thun and Lake Brienz. The munitions still lie underwater. “It was also the cheapest way to get rid of it”.

Today, the lake water is analysed regularly for signs of pollution. The army is overseeing an extensive clean-up programme. Nowadays, it stores its munitions at smaller, high-security sites. But until 2018 the army had always steered well clear of the collapsed depot in Mitholz.

Journalists from French-speaking Switzerland often ask Lanz why he and his fellow villagers have accepted their fate so stoically. They say that if the same scandal broke in

their part of the country, people would be on the street every day. “The view among most residents is that we cannot put it off any longer,” says Lanz. People are prepared to go through the anguish of evacuating Mitholz if this means that the next generation can return without the risk of an explosion ripping through the village. “We won’t be waving our pitchforks in Berne, provided they treat us correctly.”

In his mind’s eye, the mayor can see a revitalised Mitholz flourishing one day in the distant future. He can imagine the former munitions depot becoming a museum. And thanks to the constant temperatures deep underground, the site could make an ideal storage facility for maturing cheese.

JÜRIG STEINER IS A JOURNALIST AND EDITOR FOR THE “BERNER ZEITUNG”

The woman who put Napoleon in his place

Germaine de Staël, of Genevan origin, was a woman of letters and a leading intellectual who lived in Paris but had to flee to exile in Switzerland more than once.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

When asked whom he thought was the most important woman of all time, Napoleon incurred Germaine de Staël's wrath. "The woman who breeds the most offspring," he replied. Madame de Staël, a Genevan born in Paris in 1766, could have almost vied for this title, having given birth to five children herself. Although she married a Swedish baron in 1786, de Staël was anything but monogamous. Hardly anyone knew which lover fathered which of her children.

Madame de Staël certainly did not cover herself in glory as a mother. Instead, she will be remembered for her brilliant intellect, for her unbending determination to affirm herself as a woman, and, not least, for her pointed letters that earned European notoriety and infuriated the self-appointed emperor, Napoleon.

Madame de Staël survived the Revolution of 1789, to which she was initially well disposed, in her country refuge in Coppet near Geneva. However, after the fall of Robespierre she returned to Paris in 1794, where she hosted salons for the conservative intelligentsia. She warmed to Napoleon initially, but fell out with him over France's invasion of Switzerland and the subsequent creation of the Helvetic Republic.

Italy and Germany

Madame de Staël's literary successes are based on trips abroad that she made despite the precarious times in which she lived. "Corinne ou l'Italie" (Corinne, or Italy; 1807) is both the story of a love affair between a British peer and the beautiful Corinne, and an ardent homage to the culture and history of Italy. "De l'Allemagne" (Germany), the book in which de Staël famously calls Germany the "country of poets and thinkers", is based on the author's visits to Berlin and Weimar in 1803 and 1804, during which she came into contact with Goethe and Schiller. Napoleon banned the first edition of this work from France in 1810, ordering manuscripts and printing plates to be destroyed before forcing the author to retreat to Coppet. Madame de Staël still felt unsafe in Switzerland, so she fled to England in 1812, where "De l'Allemagne" was published in 1813.

Europe's liberal conscience

Napoleon's anger was understandable, because this tribute to poetic Germany was in reality a beautifully disguised protest against cultural repression in France, proving to him like no other work how eloquent an adversary de Staël had become. For France's potent dictator, Madame de Staël had long become the embodiment of Europe's liberal conscience. But these were not the only works that annoyed Napoleon. The emperor went as far as penning an anonymous, scathing critique of "Delphine", while "Corinne ou l'Italie" enraged Napoleon simply because the novel, despite being written in the year of his Italian coronation, failed to mention him at all.

"A work of interest"

When Germaine de Staël passed away on 14 July 1817 at the age of 51 after a life full of emotion, passion and sensual experiences, her Parisian salon had long since reopened in all its old splendour while Napoleon had been banished to Saint Helena forever. There, he confessed to his confidant Las Cases in August 1816, after reading de Staël, that his rival and "Corinne" preyed on his mind. "I see her, I hear her, I feel her. I want to flee from her, and I throw the book down. I had a happier recollection of the book than I do today. I will nevertheless persevere – I want to know how it ends. It does still seem to me to be a work of interest."

Bibliography: "Über Deutschland", the German translation of "De l'Allemagne", is available as a Reclam paperback.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST IN ZÜRICH



"Oh society, society! How hard it makes the heart, how frivolous the mind! How it leads us to live only for what others will say of us! If human beings could but meet freed from that influence which all collectively exercise upon each other, how pure the air that would penetrate into the soul! What new ideas, what genuine emotions would refresh it!"

(Excerpt from "Corinne ou l'Italie", Germaine de Staël; 1807)

The timeless influencer

Switzerland's fictitious national cook, Betty Bossi, came into her own during the Covid lockdown.

DÖLF BARBEN

Betty Bossi probably felt a bit like Helvetia this year. She was on hand when people needed her during the pandemic. As restaurants closed, we retreated to our own homes and reacquainted ourselves with the nation's favourite housewife. Recipes from some 120 Betty Bossi cookbooks – normally hidden behind a digital paywall – were made freely available online, showing us all how to fry burgers and bake banana bread. Successfully, it goes without saying. And the ploy worked. Once again. The Swiss visited the Betty Bossi website over ten million times. In one month.



Betty Bossi and Helvetia have one thing in common in that neither actually exist. Yet both are synonymous with Switzerland. Helvetia appears on our one- and two-franc coins. She stands upright, armed with a spear, amid a circle of stars. Betty Bossi, on the other hand, has forever and a day been helping us to answer one of life's trickiest questions: what shall I cook today?

For almost 65 years, Betty Bossi has been part of our national psyche. It is about time that we asked what her tireless cooking over a hot stove has actually achieved. Have her cook books really left a "lasting mark" on Switzerland's households, as it says in the Historical Dictionary of Switzerland? Would we still be smothering our veggies in a flour-based sauce if Betty Bossi had never existed?

The "Betty Bossi Post" was published for the first time in 1956, as a newsletter (printed on both sides) available free of charge in grocery stores. "What shall I cook today?" was the title of its first-ever article. It looked like Betty Bossi had written it herself. Her beaming face adorned the cover. Her signature was at the bottom of the piece.

This publication already contained nearly all the ingredients – excuse the pun – that make Betty Bossi the household name that she is today. To her readers she was a friend who did not simply spoon-feed her audience, but wanted to empower them. She encouraged people to create their own meal plan, so they could eat a good, varied diet, not waste any food, and have some money left over at the end of the week. And she showcased half a dozen recipes, including this one for bread pudding with apples: 300 g left-over bread; 0.5 l milk; 3 eggs; 60 g Astra-10; 300 g apples; 80 g sugar; 2 tbsp. sultanas; grated lemon peel.

"Astra-10"? Betty Bossi not only wanted to be the friend of every housewife; she also wanted to market the fats, oils and margarines of Astra – a Unilever subsidiary that operated a factory in Steffisburg near Thun. Essentially, Betty Bossi was a fictitious character from the outset. Her purpose was a reciprocal one of give and take. She was an influencer before the word had even been invented.

Betty Bossi was invented by ad writer Emmi Creola-Maag, who was inspired by the popular US women's magazine "Betty Crocker". Based on her American namesake, Betty Bossi took Switzerland by storm. According to historian Benedikt Meyer, cars, televisions and new hair styles were not the only spoils of the post-war economic miracle. Home cooking was also transformed – with electric ovens, blenders, mixers and kneaders among a new generation of kitchen utensils, and a veritable conveyor belt of new products available in the shops. Meyer: "The Swiss needed someone to help them negotiate all this technology. And Betty Bossi was their saviour."



"What shall I cook today?" This was Betty Bossi's first question – then thousands of cooking and baking recipes followed.

Photo provided

Lemon drizzle cake – the most popular Betty Bossi recipe, attracting almost half a million clicks a year



It was a huge success story. “Betty Bossi” magazine, which later became a subscription publication, continues to be read by hundreds of thousands of people. When tiramisu was first introduced as a dessert in 1984, tubs of mascarpone quickly sold out around Switzerland. The first-ever Betty Bossi cookbook was published in 1973. Since then, 35 million Betty Bossi cookbooks have been sold, the most suc-

cessful of these a book on baking cakes (1.35 million copies). If all the Betty Bossi cookbooks that have been sold were put in a line one after the other, they would stretch from Switzerland to the USA.



Betty Bossi in figures

Around 2,500 new recipes are created every year at the Betty Bossi kitchens in Basel and Zurich. “Betty Bossi” magazine is published ten times a year and has a print run of 540,000, making it Switzerland’s biggest paid-for publication. The Betty Bossi website is visited three million times per month, but this number has been much higher since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. People also view Betty Bossi recipes via a daily email newsletter that goes out to 520,000 different addresses. (DB)

As a business, Betty Bossi has always been cutting edge. From television cookery shows to online platforms, to gluten-free food. In 2012, she became a 100 per cent subsidiary of Coop, one of Switzerland’s two supermarket giants. Betty Bossi AG employs 120 people in Basel and Zurich. The company generated net sales of 89 million Swiss francs in 2019. You will see Betty Bossi around any Coop supermarket. The brand comprises over 600 different products. In addition to baking items, Betty Bossi also offers a range of convenience foods such as salads, sandwiches and ready-made meals.

For decades, Betty Bossi taught Swiss households the art of cooking. Suddenly she now wants to serve us fast food. Is that not a gigantic contradiction? There is probably no al-



Food photographers serve up appetising images of “influencer” Betty Bossi’s cooking feats.

ternative – it is hard to contradict Betty Bossi spokeswoman Viviane Bühr when she says that life is completely different now from 60 years ago. People are less active. They no longer want to stand in the kitchen for two hours every day either. As Bühr points out, the Swiss like to follow global food and lifestyle trends. Those hearty flour-based sauces belong to yesteryear. The “Bettys and Bossis”, as Bühr calls the company workforce, identify and incorporate these trends into new recipes and food products. To continue to exist in future, she says that they need to move with the times like all companies. This philosophy has worked a treat so far. “We are doing really well for a company of our size. Betty Bossi is in a great place,” she says.

Certainly, no one would resent Betty Bossi for trying to stay relevant. At least being an ageless, made-up character gives her an advantage. But how will she master this quest? What does the future hold? Her competitors are lining up – how will they respond? No one had heard of food blogs when Betty Bossi began her career as an influencer. Cookbooks were nowhere near as common as they are now. Are classic recipes such as lemon drizzle cake and pork fillets still enough for Betty to hold her own?

DÖLF BARBEN IS AN EDITOR FOR “DER BUND”



No liability regulations for Swiss multinationals

The Responsible Business Initiative failed to win a cantonal majority. Nevertheless, Swiss companies are under increasing pressure to act in an ethically responsible manner abroad.



Federal Councillor Karin Keller-Sutter's conciliatory message: "The authors of the initiative have something to show for their efforts after all."

Photo: Keystone

THEODORA PETER

Despite losing at the ballot box, the authors of the initiative "for responsible companies – protecting human rights and the environment" (Responsible Business Initiative) achieved a respectable result. A narrow majority of voters (50.7 per cent) voted yes on 29 November. However, the initiative was unable to obtain the cantonal majority required for any constitutional amendment, with only nine out of 26 cantons voting in favour. In the context of Swiss direct democracy, it is extremely rare for an initiative to achieve a popular majority and fail to win a cantonal majority. It shows how well disposed voters were to the initiative, which was backed by an alliance comprising 120 relief agencies as well as churches and environmental and human rights organisations (see "Swiss Review" 5/2020).

Federal Councillor Karin Keller-

Sutter (FDP) adopted a conciliatory tone after the vote. The justice minister had stood shoulder to shoulder with industry groups to oppose the initiative during a referendum campaign that was hard fought on both sides. Swiss companies must also respect human rights and the environment abroad, that's a given, she said. "We voted differently, but we all want the same thing."

Due diligence to prevent child labour

With the Responsible Business Initiative having been rejected, an indirect counterproposal approved by parliament last summer automatically comes into force. Unlike the initiative, the counterproposal does not include a liability clause. However, it does oblige major companies to report every year on human rights, environmental and anti-corruption standards compliance and to con-

duct due diligence regarding child labour and sourcing minerals from war-torn regions. Companies that give false information or fail to report risk fines of up to 100,000 Swiss francs. "The authors of the initiative have something to show for their efforts after all," said Keller-Sutter.

However, the people behind the initiative are disappointed. They view the measures as inadequate. "Self-policing without effective controls or liability clauses is not enough to ensure that all companies respect international environmental standards and human rights," lamented law professor and co-chair of the initiative committee Monika Roth, adding that her coalition of supporters would continue to campaign for greater corporate accountability. This is why Swiss firms should still expect their overseas business activities to be scrutinised by a watchful civil society in future.

Voters reject ban on investments in weapons manufacturers

Switzerland rejected the popular initiative "For a ban on financing war material manufacturers", with around 57 per cent of the electorate voting no. The authors of the initiative wanted to halt Swiss investment in the global arms industry. The Federal Council and parliament believe that existing bans on the funding of nuclear and chemical weapons as well as cluster munitions are sufficient. A decision is still to be made on a cross-party initiative calling for a ban on the export of arms to war-torn regions and to countries in which systematic human rights violations are taking place. (TP)



Controversial alternative to the password jungle

The Federal Council and parliament want to introduce an electronic identity (e-ID) scheme that would make it easier and more secure for us to use online services. But the plan is controversial. It will be put to the people on 7 March.

EVELINE RUTZ

You can have six, sometimes eight characters, sometimes more. A jumble of letters and numbers. If you spend a lot of time on the internet, you will doubtless have to enter countless passwords, not to mention other login data like your name, email address or customer number. It's the same riddle for anyone who wants to pay online, although security procedures often vary depending on the website.

In 2019, parliament approved new legislation aimed at “clearing the password jungle” and setting out clear rules. The Federal Act on Electronic Identification Services (E-ID Act), which will be put to voters on 7 March 2021, establishes the basis for elec-

tronic IDs. “We want to regulate the way people log in,” said Federal Councillor Karin Keller-Sutter in parliament, adding that people who use online services must be confident that statutory parameters are protecting them. What it certainly is not is a digital passport.

A way to conduct e-voting

E-ID is designed to make it easier and more secure to carry out online transactions and use e-government applications, preventing confusion and offering protection against hacker attacks. It incorporates three security levels. The highest of these, facial recognition, would be used for sharing

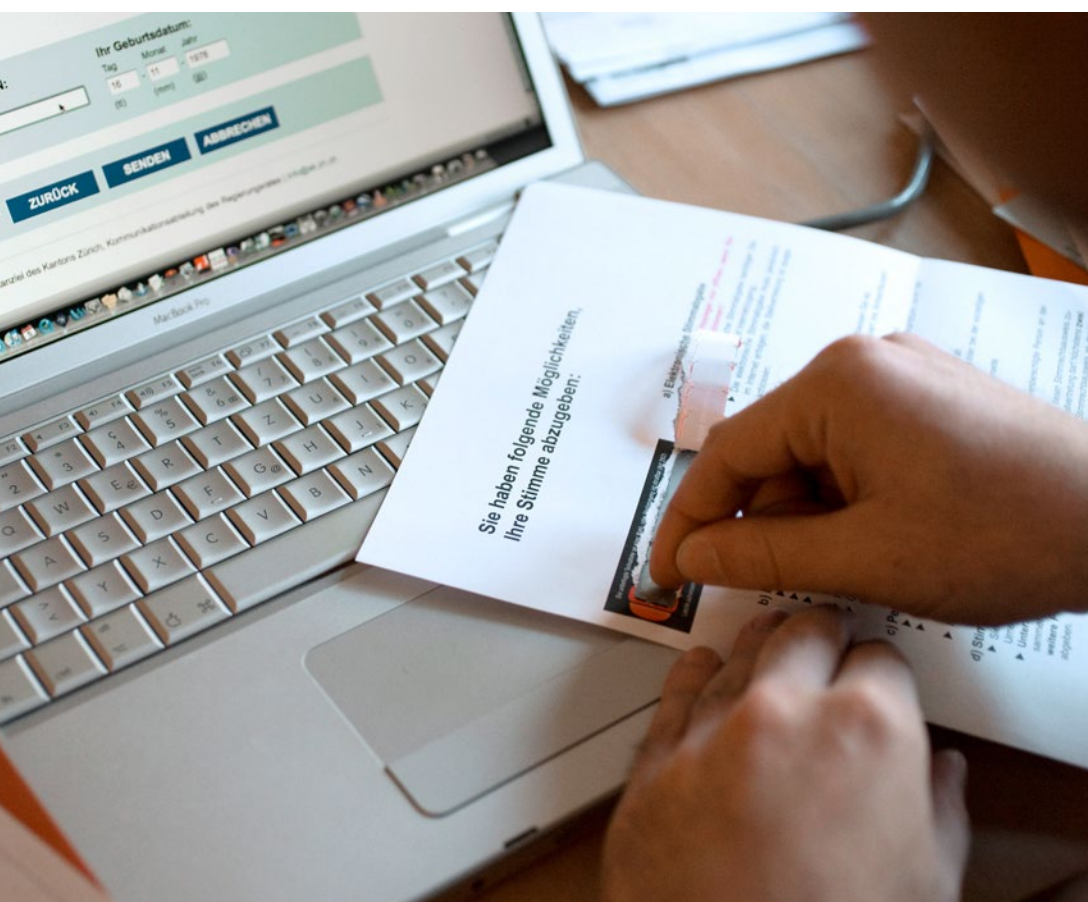
Scratch the scratch card to see your PIN, then enter the code manually. You can say a lot of things about recent attempts to introduce e-voting to Switzerland, but completely digital is not one of them. A government-controlled electronic identity scheme would change this. Photo: Keystone

particularly sensitive data, e.g. health information or in relation to online tax statements or online voting. Indeed, e-voting could become fully digital through e-ID. In other words, all official voting papers and access data would be available online. Authorities would no longer have to send PINs by post, as was the case during the previous, now-aborted e-voting scheme. E-voting providers as well as voters would, in any event, be free to choose whether to make use of this government-approved identity scheme.

Implementation of the scheme would see the public and private sector work together. The government would check and register people's identity and identifying characteristics. Private companies would issue e-IDs, as would cantonal and municipal authorities. Identity providers (IdP) would be responsible for cards, USB sticks and e-ID applications. An independent panel of experts, the Federal E-ID Committee (Eidcom), would approve and monitor IdPs.

Better solutions from the private sector?

By allocating responsibilities in this way, the Federal Council and a majority in parliament hope to ensure that e-services are workable and consumer-friendly. They argue that the private sector has greater customer proximity and can respond more flexibly to advances in technology. Karin Keller-Sutter: “Experiences in other countries show that exclusively gov-



ernment-driven solutions are less effective and successful, because the private sector chooses not to use them.”

This form of cooperation is not without its critics. It is the reason why Digital Society Switzerland, the campaign group Campax, the signature-gathering platform WeCollect, and civil society organisation PublicBeta have forced a referendum. They say that the government is failing in one of its key responsibilities and “bowing to the interests of the private sector”. Big banks, insurers, and firms with government links would be “acting like a passport office”. The initiators of the referendum believe that granting the private sector access to sensitive data is risky. In their opinion, companies primarily look out for their own interests and cannot be trusted. The government would have relatively little power to control them. Opponents of the new legislation also have doubts as to how voluntary the scheme would be. They fear that online services could pressure people into using e-ID. The SP and the Greens have already represented this view in parliament. It is a view which is shared by the Pirate Party, Switzerland’s public-sector trade union VPOD/SSP, senior citizens’ organisations, and other bodies.

Switzerland’s top data-protection official supports the E-ID Act

Supporters of the new legislation dismiss these security concerns, insisting that the government will not lose control of the people’s data. They say that the E-ID Act goes above and beyond current provisions. For example, personal information cannot be used for other purposes or forwarded with-



Data protection expert Adrian Lobsiger: E-ID would comply with data protection requirements.



Minister of Justice Karin Keller Sutter: exclusively government-driven solutions are less effective.



Critic Anita Fetz: a private monopoly is the last thing that Switzerland needs.

out prior consent. Selling such information would be against the law.

The Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner, Adrian Lobsiger, believes that the E-ID Act offers benefits with regard to data protection compliance. He explains that the E-ID Act would make things simpler, because banks, companies and authorities would no longer have to develop their own secure login systems. “It would lead to uniform statutory standards being applied to technical security and data protection,” he says. Lobsiger says that the good thing about what is being proposed is that the private sector would be funding and operating the e-ID scheme but the government would be setting the rules. If voters rejected it, Switzerland might have no other option but to recognise e-IDs offered exclusively by the private sector – also including providers unable to ensure the same type of data protection, e.g. Apple and Google. Lobsiger mentions that some cantonal authorities are already collaborating with SwissSign. These authorities use the company’s SwissID digital key to provide access to online government services.

Monopoly?

SwissSign Group is part of a joint venture involving Swiss Post, SBB, Swisscom, Six and a number of major banks and insurance companies. It would be keen on issuing its own e-ID – but sceptics such as Anita Fetz (SP/Basel-Stadt) are critical. In a parliamentary debate, the former member of the Council of States said that a private monopoly is the last thing that Switzerland needs. Justice Minister Karin Keller-Sutter dismissed these comments as “illogical”. “If that is a mo-

How much money would E-ID cost the government?

Implementing e-ID would involve a one-off outlay of 7.9 million francs. This money would fund development of the system as well as the establishment of a federal service in charge of transmitting identity and verification information. According to the Federal Office of Justice (FOJ), operating the system is likely to cost around 3.5 million francs a year. However, this would be covered by administrative fees and would therefore have no effect on the government’s balance sheet. (ERU)

nopoly, what would you call the government?” A number of providers from the private sector competing to develop their own applications is exactly what we want, she said.

E-ID is a cornerstone of the digital transformation, say supporters of the E-ID Act. Switzerland cannot afford to miss the digital boat and not make up ground on other countries. Switzerland is indeed lagging behind comparable countries in e-government. It risks falling even further behind, warn experts. This is Switzerland’s very last chance to keep control of its citizens’ identification data, declared Ruedi Noser (FDP/Zurich) in the smaller chamber, adding that any delay would play into the hands of Apple, Google, Facebook and Amazon.

On 10 July 2020, the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), referred to as the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”, decided to back the new legislation and vote yes in the referendum. However, with 37 to 26 in favour (and 18 abstentions), the decision was far from unanimous.

EVELINE RUTZ IS A FREELANCE JOURNALIST BASED IN WINTERTHUR. SHE MAINLY WRITES ABOUT POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND SCIENTIFIC ISSUES.

Dying to save the forest, the adventure of Swiss hero Bruno Manser

“Paradise War – The story of Bruno Manser” tells of the Swiss-born activist’s passion for the primary forests of Borneo and their inhabitants, the Penan. Filmed against an epic backdrop, the Swiss film could win an award at the Golden Globes.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Valentin Greutert, producer of the film “Paradise War – The story of Bruno Manser” finds himself in a confusing situation. His film, released in Switzerland at the end of 2019, was nominated by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association for the Golden Globes. There is bound to be a huge audience at the ceremony, set for 28 February 2021. An award would get this biographical film noticed around the world. But, on the other hand, the producer from Basel saw his film blocked in Germany and Austria at the beginning of November due to the lockdown. In Germany, this tale las-

ting two hours and 20 minutes had sold 3,000 tickets in four days before the cinemas closed. In Switzerland, “Paradise War” has been watched by more than 200,000 viewers in the cinema and at home. The budget ran to 6 million Swiss francs, setting this national coproduction amongst the costliest films ever produced in Switzerland.

“Paradise War” tells the story of the extraordinary life of adventurer and conservationist Bruno Manser, who was born in 1954 in Basel. The film covers the period stretching from his arrival in the Malaysian state of Sarawak in 1984 (“You’re go-

ing to die in here” warns the canoeist who brings him to the middle of the forest) until his disappearance in 2000. At that time, the efforts of this conscientious objector, shepherd and alpinist to stop or slow the destruction of the Malaysian forests had been in vain. The filming was an adventure in itself. A team of 150 people lived in the middle of the jungle for three months. “We slept on the ground, on mats. Having to conduct the filming in a foreign language was also particularly difficult,” explains Greutert. In 1992, the producer from Basel met Bruno Manser when the environmental activist visited his school to

Sven Schelker, in the centre of the shot, played the role of environmental activist Bruno Manser on screen. Nick Kelesau, Elizabeth Ballang, Matthew Crowley, David Ka Shing Tse were the other main actors. Photo provided.

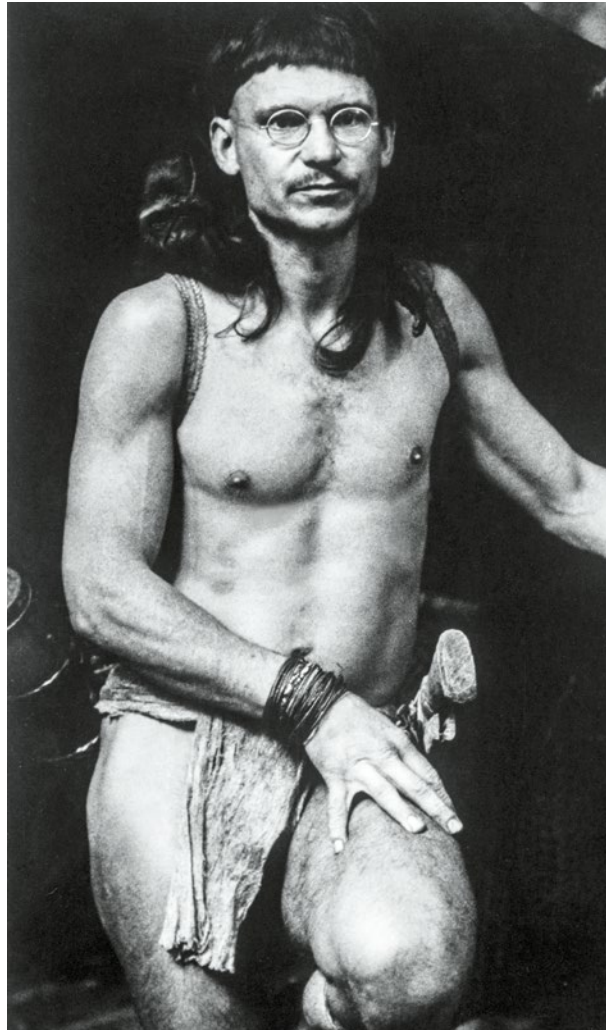


talk about tropical forests. On set, the inhabitants told of the life of Bruno Manser and their fight to prevent the destruction of their natural habitat. The majority of those involved come from a Borneo tribe called the Dayaks, located in Indonesia, because filming in Malaysia was prohibited by the authorities of the state of Sarawak.

Actors playing themselves

To stay as true as possible to the story, director Niklaus Hilber from Zurich convinced eight members of the Malaysian Penan tribe (the tribe with which Bruno Manser had lived) to participate in the film. This choice meant flying via Jakarta, as the Indonesian Dayak tribe live 200 kilometres away from the Penan. Amongst the actors in this tribe, were Nick Kelesau, who plays the role of Along Sega. This Penan chief had adopted Bruno Manser and described him as “a child in an adult’s body”. Kelesau knew Manser when he was a child. The actor Sven Schelker, who plays Bruno Manser and speaks in the Penan language, touched the heart of the adventurer’s sister, Monika Niederberger. “At times, I really saw Bruno standing in front of me, even if Sven is taller and slimmer,” she says. She remembers her excitement when Bruno would take her on walks through the forests of Basel, lifting up rocks to find insects or a lizard.

“This film is my life’s work,” states Valentin Greutert. “It tells the story of humanity. We discover how the nomadic Penan tribe have lived for thousands of years and how capitalism, hungry for resources, has swallowed their forest. It’s also the legacy of a man, as it is the commitment of Bruno Manser which has led to defo-



restation being written into the global political agenda.” The strength of the film is built on the actors’ identification with their own story. As such, scenes where the Penan construct barricades led the actors to relive moments they had effectively experienced in their own lives.

In the jungle of Borneo, one member of the team had known Manser well: Kasper Müller, an economist and former president of Ethos, a Swiss foundation for sustainable development. Originally from Basel, Müller became close friends with Manser towards the end of the 1990s. Since Manser’s disappearance in 2000, this man has represented the rights of the adventurer and his fa-

Environmental activist Bruno Manser during the time he lived with the Penan in Borneo.

Archive photo: Keystone, 1990

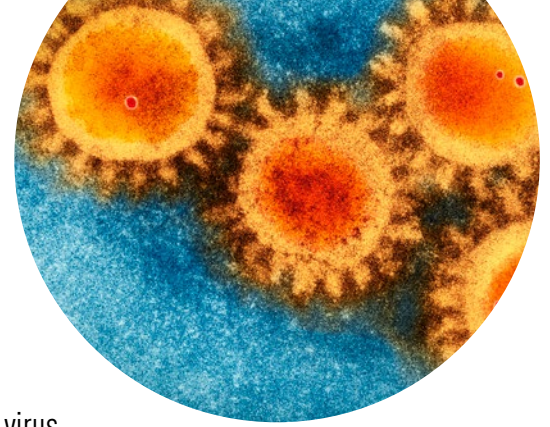
mily. “In Borneo, I saw why Bruno was so happy here, with the Penan, at least until the illegal logging began,” he explains. The economist, who chairs the Commission for Sustainable Development for Basel Kantonalbank and Banque Cler, finds that the film “really shows the systematic connections between our economic system and those of the tribes of the primary forests, as well as how the motive of profit develops new methods for accessing natural resources”. In this configuration, “the enemies of the forest are everywhere, and they don’t even know it,” notes Roger Graf, the director of the Bruno Manser Fund (BMF) in the film.

The film presents a romanticised version of a life story worthy of a novel. There is the love affair between Manser and a member of the Penan tribe, for example. The meeting in New York between Manser and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, never took place. Ditto for the attempt to obtain the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) label, which would protect the forests of Borneo. “Bruno Manser had contact with the ITTO, but he didn’t believe in labels,” explains Lukas Straumann, director of the BMF, who asked donors to help complete production. “The film allows young people to discover Bruno Manser, a modern-day hero,” he says.

Regarding the Sarawak forests, 90 per cent of them have disappeared since the 1970s. The timber produced represents a value of over 50 billion dollars, according to the BMF. Is all lost? No. Secondary forests have regrown. And the tribes of Borneo now defend their living space using geographical maps, notably created with support from the BMF.

How the pandemic spiralled out of control in Switzerland

During the second Covid-19 wave, the Confederation and cantons long remained set on a middle course between shutting the economy and preventing the spread of the virus. They failed to bring the situation under control. An abnormally high number of elderly people died.



SUSANNE WENGER

The first people in Switzerland will have received the Covid-19 vaccine by the time this edition of “Swiss Review” is published in February – a key step towards curbing the pandemic. But as I write before the festive season, the situation looks bad. After surviving the first wave relatively unscathed, Switzerland has unexpectedly become one of Europe’s Covid hotspots in the second wave. Seldom has there been so much wrangling over what to do. This in Switzerland, where everything is meant to go like clockwork. How has it come to this? Time to reconstruct the events of recent months – in the knowledge that things will have changed again by the time we go to press.

The emergency powers allowing the Federal Council to make unilateral decisions ended in early summer and the onus switched back to the cantons, not the government, to manage the crisis. Responsible for healthcare within Switzerland’s federal framework, the cantons wanted to resume control given the sharp fall in infections. The Federal Council took a back seat – even as Covid-19 rates began to surge again in October. With the curve initially steeper in some regions than others, the consensus was that local cantonal measures were better than national ones.

Switzerland going its “own way”

Infections rose dramatically, however, with daily new cases reaching a record of almost 10,000 at the start of November. The Federal Council intervened at the end of October, announcing nationwide restrictions, e.g. an extension to the rule on face coverings and a ban on public events of over 50 people. More significantly, it decided against the type of partial lockdown already introduced by French-speaking cantons with particularly high infection rates. Restaurants and shops were allowed to stay open, subject to limitations. Despite a comparatively high number of cases per 100,000 people, Switzerland’s response differed to that of neighbouring countries.

Health Minister Alain Berset (SP) said Switzerland was going its “own way”. The Federal Council wanted to protect

the population “without public life and the economy suffering unnecessary collateral damage”. Restaurant industry association GastroSuisse and the *economiesuisse* business federation signalled their relief. The authorities wanted to halve the number of cases every two weeks until Christmas – a strategy that worked initially as the curve dipped in November.

Hospitals at breaking point

Yet Switzerland could not extricate itself from the danger zone, not least because German-speaking cantons did little to combat the pandemic – much to the Federal Council’s dismay. Our small country of 26 cantons and half-cantons ended up with a confusing, contradictory hotchpotch of restrictions. Fatigue set in among the general public. By the start of December, infections had flatlined at a high level or were beginning to increase again in nearly every canton. Hospitals and care homes were feeling the strain. Intensive-care units were filling up. A disproportionately high number of elderly people were dying of Covid-19, as the second wave left its tragic mark.

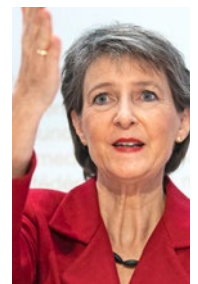
Despite a world-class healthcare system, Switzerland’s coronavirus mortality rate was high compared to other countries. The majority of victims were over 80, said Finance Minister Ueli Maurer during a radio interview in mid-November. According to Maurer, the government had had to “weigh the various implications”. In protest at what



Finance Minister
Ueli Maurer –
weighing the various
implications



Health Minister
Alain Berset –
Switzerland going its
“own way”



President of the Swiss
Confederation
Simonetta Sommaruga
Photos: Keystone

they saw as indifference among policymakers and the public, activists in Berne lit candles outside parliament. By Christmas, the virus had claimed well over 6,000 lives.

Warnings from experts

The more the situation escalated, the more heated the arguments became. Epidemiologists were now not alone in advising the government to do more. Economists also joined in, saying it was a false economy for shops and restaurants to remain open if customers were falling ill. After backing the Federal Council's decisions last spring, Swit-

ment; uncoordinated federalism; a failure to develop a preventive strategy against the second wave; the opinions of lobbies taking precedence over science; fear of the financial consequences of a lockdown – these were reasons used in Switzerland to explain the debacle. Surprise at the government's more relaxed approach to tackling the pandemic was expressed abroad. The World Health Organization slammed the country's response, while renowned US magazine "Foreign Policy" headlined with "Switzerland is choosing austerity over life". German news magazine "Der Spiegel" said Switzerland believed in its own invincibility – an attitude that had historical roots.



Cartoonist Felix Schaad on the sharp increase in deaths.

First published on 21 November 2020, www.tagesanzeiger.ch

zerland's political parties could no longer contain themselves during parliament's winter session. The SP and Greens called for stricter measures and a more generous financial package for beleaguered businesses, whereas the FDP and SVP opposed sweeping restrictions – ensuring Swiss ski resorts stayed open, as neighbouring countries were seeking a multilateral agreement to prohibit winter sports.

The media grew more critical of the government's "middle course". "Minimalism on Covid, and ski resorts to open over Christmas. Has Switzerland lost its moral compass?" asked online magazine "Republik". Even the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" noted it would be "fatal to wait". The newspaper generally agreed with Switzerland's liberal and regionally varied approach to fighting the pandemic. Yet it was a mistake in hindsight for the government and cantons not to act earlier against the rise in cases, commented the broadsheet.

The limits of individual responsibility in a highly contagious pandemic; Switzerland's sluggish system of govern-

ment; uncoordinated federalism; a failure to develop a preventive strategy against the second wave; the opinions of lobbies taking precedence over science; fear of the financial consequences of a lockdown – these were reasons used in Switzerland to explain the debacle. Surprise at the government's more relaxed approach to tackling the pandemic was expressed abroad. The World Health Organization slammed the country's response, while renowned US magazine "Foreign Policy" headlined with "Switzerland is choosing austerity over life". German news magazine "Der Spiegel" said Switzerland believed in its own invincibility – an attitude that had historical roots.

Pressure on the Federal Council was growing. In the middle of December, Switzerland's large hospitals sounded the alarm. The government then stepped in, introducing stricter nationwide rules. It instructed restaurants, sports venues, museums, and leisure facilities to close, and increased its compensation fund by 1.5 billion Swiss francs. "The rate of infection has to drop, this is imperative for the entire country," said the president of the Swiss Confederation, Simonetta Sommaruga. However, the measures lacked consistency in places and still fell short of those in other European countries. Shops remained open, as did Alpine ski resorts. Meanwhile, the World Economic Forum (WEF) announced that its annual gathering of political and business leaders in Davos would move to Singapore in 2021. Concerns about the spread of the virus in Switzerland had led the WEF to take this decision.

Up-to-date information: www.sciencetaskforce.ch

Beard business

50

Trimmed beards for better security! From 1 November 2020, police officers guarding the Federal Palace are only allowed to have beards of up to 50 millimetres in length. Longer beards are a “security issue”, says the Federal Security Service. Facially hirsute policemen have since been transferred to other posts.

380

However, length is not the only thing that matters at the so-called International Alpine Beard Festival. Pius Sidler, reigning champion in the “Natural Alpine Beard” category, not only sports a 380-mm beard, he also cuts a very authentic and dignified figure. Anyone who wishes to put up a challenge will have to wait until the next festival on 3 October 2021 in Seewis (Grisons).

1750

Incidentally, a flowing beard made by hand in Switzerland from real buffalo hair costs up to 1,750 Swiss francs and is a product beloved of St Nicholas lookalikes across the country. Switzerland’s many dedicated St Nicholas associations make tens of thousands of visits to families every year, but they had a hard time of it in 2020. Demand for their services fell amid the pandemic. At least they had plenty of time to care for their beards instead.

46

However, healthcare workers are anything but idle at the moment. “Clapping for carers” is all well and good, but no other profession is currently haemorrhaging as many people as healthcare. Around 46 per cent of all qualified personnel change careers, often at a young age. The main reason that leavers give is that they are chronically overworked due to staff shortages – a situation exacerbated every time one of their colleagues calls it a day.

1 000 000

In these turbulent times, it’s the little things that count. Take the Swiss-invented REX peeler. Dating back to 1947, it is the epitome of frugality, sleek design, and timelessness. Zena Swiss has been producing and selling a million of these patented kitchen utensils every year since 1969. If you want to know how useful this humble peeler is, ask Betty Bossi (see page 14).

FIGURES COMPILED BY MARC LETTAU

Readers give “Swiss Review” good marks – and have a clear idea of what they want

A very large proportion of “Swiss Review” readers rate our magazine as “good” or even “very good”. Many of them also have clear ideas as to how we could improve the publication. These are the results of our reader survey.

MARC LETTAU

How would readers describe “Swiss Review”? We are a trustworthy, informative magazine that provides unbiased reporting on relevant issues in a clear and comprehensible manner. This is the overriding consensus among those who took part in our reader survey in summer 2020. The Research Center for the Public Sphere and Society (FÖG) – the University of Zurich’s independent body specialised in media research – conducted the survey. According to social scientist and survey coordinator Jörg Schneider, one specific quality stands out in the results: “A very high percentage of readers think that ‘Swiss Review’ is a trustworthy publication”.

The verdict from our highly diverse, multilingual, worldwide readership was positive overall, with 42 per cent giving the magazine top marks (“very good”) and 38 per cent scoring us as “good”. A further 17 per cent are more or less satisfied, while under 3 per cent marked us as poor or very poor.

But this is just a rough snapshot. Marks varied – albeit marginally for the most part – depending on gender, age, and country of domicile. For example, the under-25s and the over-65s share a slightly more positive view of our magazine compared to age groups in between. And we consistently received slightly better marks from women than from men. Geographical distance also played a role, with people living in places like South America or Australia more inclined than EU expatriates – our main readership community – to score us higher.

According to our readers, “Swiss Review” also has weaknesses. Around 10 per cent believe that its visual appearance can be improved. This opinion came more from online readers than from readers of the print edition. “Swiss Review” is politically biased, according to 12 per cent of readers, half of whom accuse us of being too government-friendly and too afraid to speak our mind. The other half accuse us of exactly the opposite, saying that we are too critical of Switzerland, and that our position verges on “socialist”. According to Schneider, this relatively small contingent – and the views they express – confirm, if anything, that our magazine has, in his words, a “good command of controversial political issues”.

Wish list

Readers used the survey to tell us how they thought we could improve the magazine. People want to see more articles on nature and the environment – a theme that featured at the top of most readers’ wish lists. This call was loudest among young readers as well as readers who are past retirement age, although other age groups also think that green issues should be given clear priority, followed by sociopolitical topics. Readers would like to see even more report-style pieces, while “useful information” also features prominently among people’s preferences: over a third of respondents want more practical, clear advice and tips from both the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and the federal authorities.

Differences between print and online readers

There was very little difference, if any, in scoring between those who read the printed version of “Swiss Review” and those who read online. Both groups also said very similar things about how to improve the magazine. However, one significant divergence is that a large proportion of print subscribers “consume” the magazine intensively, i.e. they read many, if not all, of the articles and often discuss the content of these articles with others in their private and professional lives. Online readers consume much less intensively, both reading less and spending less time doing so.

Emotional connection

The survey results also reveal an emotional connection to the magazine, with 70 per cent of readers saying that “Swiss Review” strengthens their ties to Switzerland. “This is the most significant soft factor,” says Schneider. “Two thirds of readers also view the magazine as a sort of ‘guide’ to contemporary Switzerland.”

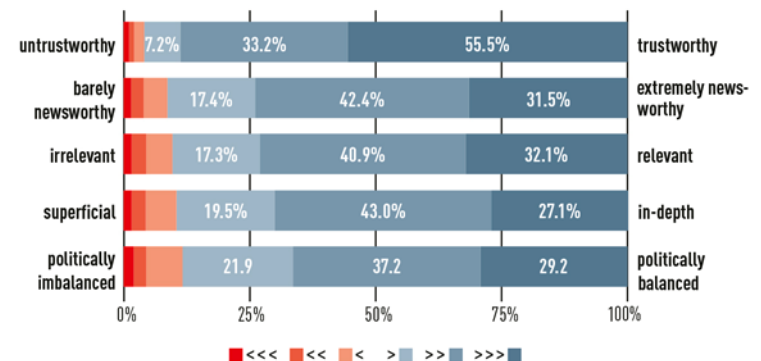
The survey in figures

Some 17,000 people took part in the “Swiss Review” reader survey coordinated by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, with around 14,000 completing the questionnaire in full. Around 5,500 people also gave a written answer to our open-ended question “What are you missing from ‘Swiss Review’?” This feedback and the completed questionnaires have helped us to assess reader satisfaction and gain an insight into what people would like to see in the magazine in future. (MUL)

The only source of information for many readers

“Swiss Review” is one of many media channels. However, 44 per cent of readers say that the magazine essentially meets all their Swiss news and information needs. Some 28 per cent say that “Swiss Review” provides their only source of news and information from Switzerland. Readers who access Swiss-related news and information from sources other than “Swiss Review” make use of Swiss newspaper and magazine websites (41 per cent), read the international press (39 per cent), visit swissinfo (19 per cent) or consult Swiss government websites (11 per cent).

Our website contains a number of frequently asked questions about “Swiss Review” (revue.ch/en/faq). For additional information, visit revue@swisscommunity.org.



New website for OSA, Youth Service and “Swiss Review”

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) – which since 1 January also goes under the name of “SwissCommunity” – launched a new, combined website at the beginning of the year.

All OSA, “Swiss Review” and Youth Service content can now be found at www.swisscommunity.org. Readers of our magazine can still visit www.revue.ch, which will redirect automatically to the new shared website.

The new website not only features fresh content and advice – it will also be our community hub allowing the Swiss Abroad to interact, share knowledge, opinions and information, get helpful tips, and announce events online.

This revamp has been in the pipeline for a long time but has now taken on added significance since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, says OSA Director Ariane Rustichelli. “The pandemic has shown us how important it now is to stay connected,” she says. The aim of the new website is to help ensure that people stay in touch. “Not only will it strengthen people’s connection and attachment to Switzerland, but it will also provide the Swiss Abroad with additional opportunities to interact.” However, online interaction is no substitute for face-to-face contact. Rustichelli: “Ultimately, people still need to meet each other. That goes without saying.” Which is why our traditional Swiss expatriate associations have nothing to fear from increased digitalisation. On the contrary. “Digitalisation will help them to enhance their profile.” Strengthening and underscoring their role and objectives within this highly interconnected community is the challenge they face. (MUL)

Summer camps for children aged 8 to 14

Swiss children living abroad will have an opportunity to get to know Switzerland and its culture – and have a great time with around 40 other children from around the world – at a series of two-week summer camps from the end of June to the end of August 2021.

There are still some free spots available on our holiday camps. For further details on the 2021 summer season as well as the relevant application form, visit www.sjas.ch/en/camps/.

(LR)

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA), Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland; tel.: +41 31 356 61 16; fax: +41 31 356 61 01; email: info@sjas.ch, www.sjas.ch

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

www.revue.ch
www.swisscommunity.org



Our partners:

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



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



Stiftung für junge Auslandschweizer
Fondazione per i giovani svizzeri all'estero
Fundazioni per i giovani svizzeri all'estero

New events in 2021: online offers to accompany the traditional summer and winter camps

This year, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, under the name SwissCommunity, is organising a summer camp and a winter camp, and for the first time will be providing online offers for young Swiss Abroad aged between 15 and 25.

Due to the global health situation (Covid-19 pandemic), the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad has taken the difficult decision to reduce the number of camps originally planned for 2021. Just two camps will be organised: one in the Vaud Alps and one in the Pennine Alps. The summer camp will take place from 10 to 23 July 2021 in Château-d'Oex and the winter camp will be from 27 December 2021 to 5 January 2022 in Grächen.

Of course, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad is closely monitoring the evolution of the pandemic in the world. Any change which may impact the organisation of the camps will be announced on the website www.swisscommunity.org.



Enjoying fondue at the 2019 Sainte-Croix sports and holiday camp – before face coverings and social distancing

Given the uncertainty surrounding the organisation of the camps, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad is pleased to be able to offer young Swiss living abroad an alternative. For the first time, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad will be providing online offers, combining learning, fun and new encounters. All offers can be found at www.swisscommunity.org.

For more information:

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Youth service, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Bern, Switzerland, telephone +41 31 356 61 24, email: youth@swisscommunity.org, www.swisscommunity.org

“It would be a great first step if we had 40 per cent women”

Better representation of women is an objective shared by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA). The elections to the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) offer a tangible opportunity in this regard. What is OSA Director Ariane Rustichelli's view on the matter?

INTERVIEW: MARC LETTAU



OSA Director Ariane Rustichelli: “Better female representation is necessary at all levels and in all decision-making bodies.”

Some 44 women and 76 men represent the Swiss expatriate community in the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”, the CSA. The proportion of women is too low in your opinion.

Yes, it is too low for the simple reason that women represent the majority of people in the “Fifth Switzerland”. Women account for 54 per cent of the 770,000 Swiss who live abroad. But it is more than just a question of percentages. A council should reflect the community it represents as closely as possible. Proper female representation also translates into a different way of going about things in terms of the political agenda, the culture of debate and identifying solutions for example. We are currently seeing this in Switzerland. The women’s strike and other initiatives are factors that resulted in more women being elected to the federal parliament in 2019. We can now see the substantive outcome.

The National Council is made up of 42 per cent women. Women account for 36 per cent of people who sit on the CSA. Does the percentage of women in the CSA need to increase to over 40 per cent?

Looking at it pragmatically, yes. It would be a great first step if we had 40 per cent women.

And what would be the second step?

The actual aim is 50 per cent or more, because again we want the CSA to reflect the diverse Swiss expatriate community as accurately as possible. By the way, this is not an end in itself.

Diversity always enriches our lives and is one of the keys to better and more broadly based decision-making.

Reflecting social diversity is not solely about ensuring better representation of women.

Correct. We should not forget to engage with all age groups either. Basically, we need to get young people more involved.

Apart from appealing to voters, what else can the OSA do to ensure better female representation?

We have to do more than just appeal to voters. Better female representation is necessary at all levels and in all decision-making bodies. In particular, this applies to the Swiss associations and umbrella organisations that run the CSA election process in each region. If these bodies are also serious about improving female representation, the number of candidates will increase. And if more women stand for election, more women will be elected.

In future, the OSA wants all Swiss Abroad in any given country to be able to participate in CSA elections, regardless of whether they are registered with a Swiss association or not. Would direct elections such as these help to further the female cause?

Women’s chances increase if more of them can vote and stand for election. At least that is the theory. However, experience shows that a change of system on its own is not enough. We need an environment that encourages women. Women often still feel less empowered to stand for office. Perhaps they need fresh role models.

A worldwide election

Between January and June 2021, Swiss expatriates around the world will vote to determine the composition of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), referred to as the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”. The CSA has 140 delegates, of whom 120 represent Swiss communities abroad and 20 live in Switzerland. Not all countries share the same procedure for electing CSA delegates, so the vote will not be centrally coordinated. Everything you need to know about the elections will appear in your regional edition of “Swiss Review”, courtesy of the Swiss association or umbrella organisation in your area. (MUL)

This is all still hypothetical, because direct elections will not be taking place in 2021.

This is true. The best direct elections are when everyone can vote online. However, the suspension of e-voting in Switzerland has set us back. No other government solutions are available. Consequently, we are pinning our hopes on an alternative e-voting system. We have already evaluated it, but procuring and rolling it out takes time. Nevertheless, our efforts underscore how important introducing direct elections remains. Essentially, direct elections would provide the CSA with greater legitimacy and political leverage.

Gaining work experience in Switzerland

educationsuisse gives advice on all matters related to education in Switzerland as well as tips on gaining initial work experience in Switzerland.

Would you like to work as a language assistant at a Swiss upper secondary school or a vocational school for a year?

Young students or recent graduates from countries whose official national language is English, German, French, Spanish or Italian can gain teaching experience in Switzerland. As native speakers, they enrich language lessons and exemplify cultural aspects of their country of residence. Language assistants receive a salary which just covers their living costs in Switzerland. Applications for the 2021/22 school year are being accepted until the end of March 2021.

For detailed information about the Language Assistants programme, please consult ogy.de/movetia or send an email to edith.funicello@movetia.ch.

Would you like to work as an au pair in Switzerland?

Working as an au pair for a family with children can be a good opportunity for young Swiss Abroad to get to know their country of origin better. The salary is nothing to write home about, but they receive free board and lodging and enough spare time to attend a language course, for example.

Various organisations arrange au pair placements. Please contact educationsuisse for a list of addresses.

Would you like to help out on a farm in Switzerland for several weeks?

Agriviva, www.agriviva.ch, is an association that organises placements lasting several weeks for young people aged up to 25 and from around the world. In return for free board and lodging and a small amount of pocket money, you will help a farming family with their daily work. These placements are ideal for young people who like to be active, love the outdoors, and are keen to get to know a new family and experience life on a Swiss farm. (RG)

educationsuisse offers young Swiss Abroad specific advice on all matters related to education in Switzerland. Its employees speak German, French, Italian, Spanish and English and are available to answer your questions via email, telephone, Skype or in the office in Berne.

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



Language assistant Leslie Schmid, Swiss Abroad from Canada, at work Photo provided.



Federal votes

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

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

On 4 November 2020, the Federal Council decided that there will be three federal proposals submitted to the people on 7 March 2021:

- Popular initiative "Yes to a ban on full facial coverings"
- Federal Act on Electronic Identification Services
- Federal Decree on the approval of a comprehensive economic partnership agreement between the EFTA member states and Indonesia

Popular initiatives

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

- Federal Popular Initiative "Pay 7,500 francs to every Swiss citizen (Helicopter Money Initiative)" (20.04.2022)

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in German at:

www.bk.admin.ch > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen

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

The elections to the Council of the Swiss Abroad

An election where only the members of certain associations can vote is a bit like no one apart from registered members of political parties being able to determine the composition of the National Council. Surely it should be easy to record every Swiss citizen living abroad – the various diplomatic missions should have everyone's address. To be a truly representative council, the CSA needs to get Switzerland's embassies to conduct the elections.

SEBASTIAN RENOLD, BRNO, CZECH REPUBLIC

The CSA elections are for an exclusive club. It says in the last issue that "Any Swiss Abroad is entitled to vote, provided that they belong to a recognised Swiss association". Yet Swiss Abroad affiliated to associations are a clear minority among Swiss living abroad. Therefore, delegates elected by association members cannot claim to "represent the interests of all Swiss Abroad". A democratically elected "Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland" would be different to what we have now.

ARTHUR MEYER, VIENNA, AUSTRIA

What does our home soil sound like?



A noisy soil is a healthy soil! There is more biodiversity under than above the surface. These organisms are responsible for the environmental benefits soils provide us. Very nice publication by the "Swiss Review". And important to grow awareness about the soil, usually not valued by people... seen by many as just dirt! Congratulations!

CRISTINE MUGGLER, MINAS GERAIS, BRAZIL

Thank you for this very interesting piece. There is indeed a noticeable difference between organically and intensively cultivated land – the latter is devoid of life! What a fascinating study.

ALAIN BONET, KIBBUTZ TZE'ELIM, ISRAEL

A new-found miracle of nature – incredible! And something from which we can all learn. Many thanks for this article.

MARIANNE SFINAROLAKI-BÜHLER, CRETE, GREECE

What a fantastic research, congratulations to the researchers and the "Swiss Review" for this wonderful publication. As an agroecologist and soil scientist I think we can promote this approach in soil research in Brazil.

GILSON WALMOR DAHMER, MATINHOS, PARANÁ, BRAZIL

Implications for the framework agreement after voters reject the "limitation initiative"



A "resounding 'yes' to the bilateral relationship with the EU" is by no means a yes to an agreement that states that one party – the European Court of Justice – would adjudicate disputes between Switzerland and the EU. That would be like a child's father settling a quarrel with someone else's child. No, Switzerland – your sovereignty is more important than bowing to diktats from Luxembourg. I am grateful that a party like the SVP are opposed. They are still Switzerland's biggest party, so less of the schadenfreude, please.

JÜRIG SCHWENDENER, PHUKET, THAILAND

History has shaped the political framework of Swiss democracy, which is heavily influenced by our country's unique mountain geography. This is why the Swiss people alone must continue to have the final word on how Switzerland's lawmakers run the country. If there is to be any rapprochement with the EU, Switzerland must insist on having special status.

DORIS THUT, MUNICH, GERMANY

It is quite interesting to see that most of the reader comments here are critical of the EU. In no way do they reflect attitudes among the wider Swiss expatriate community. Anyone who thinks that their nationalistic, backward-looking outlook is the answer to all our ills is in cloud cuckoo land.

CHRISTOPH TWERENBOLD, COLOGNE, GERMANY

IMPRINT:
"Swiss Review", the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 47th year of publication and is published in German, French, English and Spanish in 14 regional editions. It has a total circulation of 431,000, including 253,000 electronic copies. Regional news appears four times a year. The ordering parties

are fully responsible for the content of advertisements and promotional inserts. This content does not necessarily represent the opinion of either the editorial office or the publisher.
EDITORS: Marc Lettau (MUL), Editor-in-Chief; Stéphane Herzog (SH); Theodora Peter (TP); Susanne Wenger (SWE); Consular Directorate, Innovation

and Partnerships, responsible for news.admin.ch
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Sandra Krebs
TRANSLATION: SwissGlobal Language Services AG; LAYOUT: Joseph Haas, Zürich; PRINT: Vogt-Schild Druck AG, 4552 Derendingen
POSTAL ADDRESS: Publisher, editorial office, advertising: Organisation of the

Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Tel.: +41313566110.
Account: IBAN CH97 0079 0016 1294 4609 8 / KBBECH22
Email: revue@aso.ch

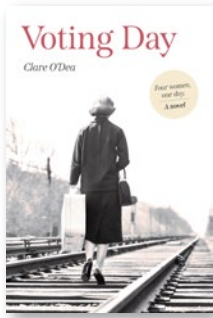
COPY DEADLINE for this edition:
29 November 2020

All Swiss Abroad who are registered with a Swiss representation receive the magazine free of charge. Anyone else can subscribe to the magazine for an annual fee (Switzerland: CHF 30 / abroad: CHF 50). Subscribers are sent the magazine direct from Berne.
www.revue.ch

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



Voting day



CLARE O'DEA:
"Voting Day"
ISBN 978-2-9701445-0-2
119 pages, CHF 20

"It was going to be the best possible day. Vreni didn't care about the fog that had been smothering the farm since Friday..." Farmer's wife Vreni is supposed to be making sandwiches for the ballot counters, as she does on every voting day. But this year is very different, because she must travel to Berne for an operation. Her daughter Margrit, who works in the city as a secretary, is due to meet her there. But Vreni ends up having to come to her daughter's aid before going under the knife. Margrit is being sexually harassed by her boss and unable to stop his advances.

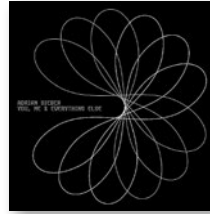
While in hospital, Vreni gets to know cleaning lady Esther and her boss Beatrice. Esther was taken from her Yenish family and put into care as a child. Now her own son has been taken away and put into a foster home. The boy works at Vreni's farm. Beatrice is a middle-class single woman who is devoted to her job as an administrator at the hospital. She has also been putting her heart and soul into the yes campaign for women's suffrage – the issue on which the country is voting on this particular Sunday in 1959.

In "Voting Day", author Clare O'Dea devotes a chapter to each of these four very different women whose paths cross – and life trajectories change – on this day in 1959. It is an important day for all Swiss women, because Swiss men are voting for the first (but not the last) time on whether women should get the right to vote. O'Dea tells the story as seen through the eyes of these four women, all of whom have different social backgrounds. She adroitly intertwines the characters' respective life stories to highlight the situation of women in Switzerland at the end of the 1950s. The author writes in a simple yet very affectionate way, recounting the fate of women who want to take control of their own lives.

Clare O'Dea was born in 1971 in Dublin, where she went on to study languages and work as a journalist. She has lived in Switzerland in the canton of Fribourg since 2003, on the invisible line where the French- and German-speaking cultures meet. She is an author, a journalist and a translator. Her acclaimed non-fiction book "The Naked Swiss" was published in 2016. "Voting Day" is O'Dea's short debut novel, available in the original English as well as in German, French and Italian.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

Life after the Lovebugs



ADRIAN SIEBER:
"You, Me & Everything Else",
Phonag, 2020

There has been no media fuss, nor is it official yet, but the Lovebugs – one of the most successful Swiss pop acts of the last 25 years – are quietly disbanding. Or, shall we say, they are putting the project on ice. Indefinitely.

And what has the frontman been doing to while away the time during this potentially permanent interruption? He has recorded a solo album. Adrian Sieber made his eponymous debut 12 years ago, and now the singer has doubled up during the Covid lull with "You, Me & Everything Else".

Sieber has already shown that he can write great melodies – Lovebugs hits like "Bitter Moon" and "Music Makes My World Go Round" are Swiss pop gold. The lead singer of Basel's favourite band is now back at his melancholic yet optimistic best, with a memorable collection of songs that create a sound that is both euphoric and vulnerable on the one hand and raw and multi-layered on the other.

Talking of sound, analogue synthesisers and drum machines are conspicuous throughout – as opposed to guitars from Sieber's band years. Opener "The Soft Revolution" features an airy, anachronistic synth rhythm, pimped computer beats and naturally a catchy melody – an aesthetic that runs through the entire album. The style is unmistakably 1980s – "The school disco music of my youth in Fricktal," says Sieber, tongue firmly in cheek.

For years, Sieber was able to live out his dream as a professional musician. He is now a 47-year-old father and primary school teacher, hence the album addresses themes such as growing older, relationships going sour, chemistry between people, and life in the real world. Some of the lyrics are wistful, but – typical Sieber – hope and happiness still shine through in every song.

This is a good album. Now all that is left for Sieber to do is perform his new tracks on stage when the pandemic is over one day. And, who knows, maybe the Lovebugs will also get back together.

MARKO LEHTINEN

Livia Leu



Livia Leu has the hardest job in Swiss diplomacy. The Federal Council has appointed her as the new chief negotiator for further talks with the EU on the Swiss-EU framework agreement. Leu has a monumental task ahead of her – a nut that was too hard to crack for her predecessors. However, this 59-year-old leading diplomat has overcome other notable challenges during her long career. In 2008, the then Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey appointed Leu the new Swiss ambassador to Iran – making her the first-ever female head of a foreign diplomatic mission in Tehran. Leu also represented US interests in Iran during her time in this role (Iran and the USA have had no formal diplomatic relations since 1980). For example, she helped to secure the release of three young American tourists who had been held at the notorious Evin prison for two years on suspicion of spying.

After almost five years in Iran, Leu returned with her family to Berne, where she subsequently headed the Bilateral Economic Relations Division within the Federal Administration. She then took on the prestigious role of Swiss ambassador to France in 2018, before being reassigned to the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs by Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis last autumn. Now the government is pinning its hopes on Leu to break the Swiss-EU logjam. Speaking to the media for the first time in her new post, she said that she was “looking forward to this big challenge”. On how much bargaining scope there was in Brussels, Leu – ever the diplomat – gave little away to journalists. But she did say that “creative solutions” were needed. In other words? “More than just a plan A or a plan B.”

THEODORA PETER

No turns to yes

SVP doyen and former Federal Councillor Christoph Blocher will receive a 1.1-million-franc pension. After being ousted from the Federal Council in 2007, the billionaire publicly declared that he would not draw his ministerial pension entitlement. But he made a U-turn in July 2020 by demanding a backdated pension worth 2.7 million. The government has now decided to pay him 1.1 million francs – and do everything in its power to prevent similar episodes in future. (MUL)

Serious allegations against Darius Rochebin

Star journalist Darius Rochebin featured in the last issue of “Swiss Review”. However, serious allegations were made against him shortly after we went to press. According to the newspaper “Le Temps”, employees at French-language Swiss broadcaster RTS have made sexual harassment complaints against a number of executives. One of those accused is Darius Rochebin. Gilles Marchand, director general of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation and previously head of RTS until 2017, admitted mistakes and called for an urgent investigation. We await further details. (MUL)

The CVP remove their Christian label

The Christian Democratic People’s Party (CVP) are ditching the “C”, having decided in November that their new name will be “The Centre” from 2021 onwards. They say that removing the adjective “Christian” from their name will make it easier to appeal to urban voters in the middle of the political spectrum. The CVP, whose conservative and Catholic origins date back to the 19th century, have been represented in the Federal Council since 1891. (MUL)

The BDP merge with the CVP

In future, Swiss politics will have one party less. The Conservative Democratic Party (BDP), founded in 2008, will also be part of “The Centre”. That is to say, it is merging with the CVP. Both parties have stood shoulder to shoulder at federal level in recent years. The CVP are strongest in Catholic areas of the country, while the BDP performs best in the cantons of Berne and Grisons. (MUL)

“Marriage for all” becomes a reality

Switzerland has paved the way for same-sex marriage. In December, the Council of States ratified the National Council’s decision to allow same-sex couples to tie the knot. Lesbian couples wanting to start a family will also be able to receive sperm donations. (MUL)

We need our first snow taxi.

Les Clétières, Valais, © Ivo Scholz



We need Switzerland.



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

