

MAY 2023

Swiss Review

The magazine
for the Swiss Abroad



Plant-based or meat – Switzerland rethinks its eating habits

Agnes Hirschi escaped the Holocaust as a child –
and now tells school children about it

Switzerland set to finally deliver
on a long-standing climate pledge



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In solidarity,

Sarah Wyss (Member of the National Council BS) and
Fabian Molina (Member of the National Council ZH)
Vice Presidents SP International

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Cover photo: By Max Spring, our Berne-based cartoonist. www.maxspring.ch

Bon appétit



Food can change the world and wow the senses. You may say I am a dreamer, but it’s true. What we cook and eat can have a direct bearing on some serious issues. One of these is food waste. Another is the question of how we can reduce our oversized environmental footprint. You see, food is also a question of sustainability. Which brings us to the theme of this edition’s Focus article: the faint whiff of revolution on Swiss dinner tables. Most of us eat enough – and many of us like to eat well. But how can we eat well without endangering the future of the planet at the same time? Switzerland has responded with some innovative answers.

This is where I was going to suggest a few interesting recipes to change the world myself. However, an item of breaking news on the day of our editorial deadline ruined everyone’s appetite. Big bank Credit Suisse (CS) pretty much collapsed like a house of cards overnight. Its demise is unsettling. Founded originally as Schweizerische Kreditanstalt (SKB) in 1856, no other bank played such a key role in Switzerland’s industrial development. The Switzerland that we know today bears testimony to SKB’s scale of ambition back then.

Gone are those pioneering days. Bad debts, unsustainable risk, wrong decisions, squandered trust, misconduct on the part of individual employees, and managers paying themselves exorbitant bonuses were a combination that proved too toxic. The damage is immense. And the country as a whole is in this mess together. The federal government and the Swiss National Bank have had to provide UBS with billions of Swiss francs in loans and guarantees to underpin UBS’s forced takeover of Credit Suisse.

And if Credit Suisse was in many ways the prime example of a bank being “too big to fail” due to the inherent interdependencies of the financial system, just think of how enormous UBS has now become. As the banks’ fellow Zurich residents the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” put it on the day after the takeover: “Switzerland got rid of a zombie but woke up to a monster on Monday.” The UBS balance sheet is now almost twice as big as Switzerland’s annual economic output. That is a lot to digest.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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

**Swiss
Community**

The whiff of revolution from the dinner table



Salmon with cream cheese on a toasted baguette? No, the “salmon” is a vegan imitation made of carrot, while the “cream cheese” is made from almonds. Photo: Keystone

With climate considerations in mind, the Swiss are rethinking their shopping and eating habits, as plant-based protein becomes more mainstream. However, it is fair to say that Switzerland remains a nation of meat eaters.

DENISE LACHAT

Luc has prepared a fruit skewer for his mid-morning snack, along with some vegetable dips followed by pasta salad with cherry tomatoes and Haloumi for the main course and a layered glass of quark, yoghurt, berries, and crumble for dessert. The nine-year-old is attending a cookery course. Accompanying the boy is his father, who confesses he would have made something different. “But he enjoys it, that’s the main thing.” Luc’s primary school in Berne arranged the tuition. The idea is that children who dabble in cooking eat a more diverse, balanced diet and are more receptive to new foods.

Studying the production process at Kempthal-based Planted Foods AG also feels like a classroom lesson, albeit the subject matter is related more to physics and chemistry. You start with a flour mixture. This can be made from peas, sunflower seeds, or oats. This is fed into a big machine, where it is mixed with water and rapeseed oil, then kneaded, heated, and pressed. You end up with a dough that can be cut in different ways depending on whether you want it to resemble chicken breast, chicken strips, or kebab. Clad in white smocks and sanitary hats, employees at the laboratory-like company factory in the Zurich Oberland are producing plant-based imitation meat. The Planted Foods mantra is clear: “Every chicken counts.” No animals are killed in the making of these products. The firm says that over a million chickens (and counting) have been saved from slaughter thanks to the consumption of its products. According to Planted Foods, global warming is another issue. Tradi-

tional animal meat production is one of the largest instigators of the climate crisis, it writes.

Looks like meat, tastes like meat

Plant-based means more vegetables and cereals – and less meat. But why make imitation meat in the first place? Why invest so much technology into pulling globular plant-based proteins together to look like sinuous muscle fibres? Why ferment these proteins with microbes such as fungi and bacteria? And why go through the complex process of producing bigger, juicier, more complex and more ten-

der cuts and adding micronutrients like vitamin B12? Planted Foods has an oven-ready answer for these and other FAQs: “We humans are creatures of habit, as we all know. To have an impact on the planet, our eating habits need to change. The best way to do this is with a meat-like product that can be integrated into our eating habits.”

Meat alternatives from the supermarket giants

Meat analogues, i.e. plant-based products that mimic meat, seem to satisfy a consumer need. As far back as 1997, Migros began selling products made from Quorn, which is derived from a fermented, edible fungus. Its Cornatur brand was pioneering at the time. Meat substitutes have become increasingly popular of late, and we are seeing greater innovation, says Migros spokeswoman Carmen Hefti. Migros now has over 1,000 different vegan items in its range, of which meat and milk substitutes are the most popular, according to Hefti. Erstwhile niche products such as these have entered the mainstream. Coop has had a wide range of meat substitutes on its shelves – including own-brand Délicorn – since 2006. Bratwurst and schnitzel were among its first plant-based products. The supermarket currently offers over 2,000 vegetarian products, of which more than 1,800 are vegan, says Coop spokesman Caspar Frey. The retailer stocks over 100 vegan meat and fish alternatives, more than 50 milk alternatives, 40 vegan yoghurts, 20 vegan butters, and some 20 vegan cheese alternatives. Vegan

Focusing on future-proof solutions

The world’s population will be just under ten billion by 2050. If so many are to be fed without endangering the planet, food production as well as eating habits must radically change. This means less meat, sugar, and fewer eggs – and more vegetables, nuts, and legumes. In addition to the public sector, numerous NGOs in Switzerland are working to achieve this goal. One of them is the “Fourchette verte – ama terra” quality and health label for canteens, which applies to 17 cantons and aims to reduce meat and fish consumption, promote environmentally and animal-friendly food production, and minimise food waste. Tools such as Eaternity, which calculates the carbon footprint of canteen menu options, or Beelong, which scores foods on a scale from A to G, also help to improve sustainability for food caterers in care homes, hospitals, preschools, and companies.

(DLA)

Good examples of ways for municipalities and cantons to promote sustainable nutrition (document available in French, German and Italian): [revue.link/menu](https://www.revue.link/menu)



Feeding our insatiable appetite for chicken – a poultry farm with 18,000 birds in Gundetswil (canton of Zurich). Photo: Keystone

milk alternatives are also finding favour among Migros customers, who have been able to buy soya drinks since 2010 and now have oat, rice, almond, soya, quinoa, chickpea, coconut and hazelnut beverages to choose from. In recent years, Migros has seen double-digit growth in non-dairy alternatives, says Hefti, without specifying precise sales figures. Coop also prefers to communicate in percentages. It says that vegan milk alternatives have gained market share over the last four years and now account for 18 per cent of total milk sales. Frey: “At present, more than one in seven milk products at Coop are vegan.”

For the sake of the planet

Are animal-based foods becoming less attractive to Swiss consumers? Are we all eating fruit and veg, and more specifically plant-based proteins, instead? Yes and no. According to the Plant-based Food Report published by Coop in January this year, 63 per cent of the Swiss population consciously choose to have a day without eating animal-based foods more than once a month. This is over 20 per cent more than ten years ago. Meanwhile, the first-ever Swiss Meat Substitutes Report by the Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG), covering the Swiss retail sector from 2016 to 2020, says that sales of meat substitutes have risen sharply: from 60 million Swiss francs in 2016 to 117 million in 2020. They have almost doubled in four years, increasing by an average of 18.4 per cent each year. The biggest growth is in meat analogues, says the report.

A shift in attitudes is cited as the factor driving the change in consumer habits, with people in the industrialised West viewing food and drink as



Plant-based chicken made from pea protein – one of a new and increasingly popular range of meat substitutes. Photo: Planted Foods



Plant-based alternatives to milk are a firm fixture on Swiss supermarket shelves these days. Photo: Keystone

Two popular initiatives on food production

Will food production soon be on the political agenda? Two popular initiatives are calling for more home-grown food produce in Switzerland, but advocate two diametrically opposing agricultural policy approaches. One wants Swiss farmers to produce less feed for animals and grow more plant-based foods for people. The other initiative wants to reduce biodiversity areas to ramp up intensive food and fodder production. (DLA)

less of a means to an end and more as a lifestyle choice to promote health and enjoyment, and preserve natural resources. “Many people are becoming more aware of the impact of our consumer and eating habits on the environment, climate, and animal welfare,” it said in the 2019 Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute European Food Trends Report, for which 39 experts from Europe, North America, and Asia were interviewed. According to the Coop study, environmental concerns are now put forward as the main argument for eating less meat in Switzerland. This applies to all diets, from flexitarian to vegan. And the younger you are, the more likely this is to be the case.

A nation of meat eaters

Despite remarkable growth, meat substitutes are still very much a niche area. According to the latest figures from the Swiss meat industry association Proviande, they accounted for a market share of no more than 3.4 per cent in 2021. In point of fact, there has been no decrease in Swiss meat consumption. Since the mid-1990s, the average Swiss resident has carried on consuming around 50 kg of meat per year. They ate 50.91 kg in 2020 and 51.82 kg in 2021. Overall, beef consumption is down and chicken consumption up. Retailer Coop also says that the demand for meat remains high – even in January, or “Veganuary”.

According to Coop spokesman Frey, meat substitutes appeal to vegetarians, vegans, flexitarians, those who also like to eat plant-based alternatives, and those who are interested in food trends or in a varied diet. There is no one-to-one inverse correlation between sales of meat and of meat substitutes. Such products mainly attract people who do not eat meat, says Pro-



Butchering a calf at Angst AG in Zurich. Despite the advent of substitute foods, meat consumption in Switzerland remains high. Photo: Keystone



Canteens have a big influence on what people eat, because they can encourage – or discourage – new food trends. Photo: Shutterstock



In Switzerland, food sharing plays an increasingly important role in helping to reduce food waste. Photo: Keystone

viande spokeswoman Gioia Porlezza. On the other hand, meat substitutes and meat are not mutually exclusive. “You can easily consume both to diversify your protein.”

In any case, there are considerable synergies between “natural” foods and sustainable high-tech foods. Experts concede that science is playing an increasing role in food production.

Sustainable nutrition

The federal government formulates strategies and legislation to promote sustainable nutrition. More and more cities and municipalities have taken the lead and put sustainable food on the menu at schools, care homes, and public institutions (see box). Even cooking lessons at primary schools have changed; the beloved home economics textbook “Tiptopf” has been completely revised. Half of the recipes in the March 2023 edition are new. They include lentil bolognese and tofu stew. “The book contains more vegetarian and vegan recipes than earlier editions,” says Anita Stettler, marketing project manager at Schulverlag plus AG. “In partnership with the vegetarian restaurant Hiltl, we also created a supplementary cookbook called Greentopf in 2019, focusing purely on vegetarian and vegan cuisine.”

A clear trend

Has a culinary revolution begun? We are at least seeing a discernible trend, according to Andrew Gordon, CEO of Eldora AG – a business that manages and supplies canteens in companies as well as at schools, preschools, hospitals, and care homes. Eldora now offers a daily vegetarian option on its menus, says Gordon. This option accounts for about ten per cent of can-

teen meals eaten in French-speaking Switzerland, where Eldora has its roots. Demand is slightly higher in German-speaking Switzerland. It is primarily the public sector pushing for meat-free options. A vegetarian meal must be served at least once a week at schools and preschools. There is also a growing clamour for regional produce – although guests are reluctant to pay more for the privilege, unfortunately, says Gordon. “This squeezes our margins.” Humans

The new type of Swiss shopping receipt

Nuggets, Délicorn, Coop

Quorn vegan nuggets

Planted Guggeli, Planted Foods

Chicken alternative made from pea protein

Wood Smoked Rüeblì Lax, Mr Vegan

Salmon alternative made from carrots

vEGGie, Garden Gourmet, Nestlé

Vegan egg substitute made from soya protein

Mandel Vegurt Mokka, Migros

Vegan almond-mocha butter yoghurt

MozaVella Bio, Züger

Vegan mozzarella made from almonds and oats

are contradictory creatures, he sighs. As the Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute says in its study, “We Swiss want the best of both worlds: global and local.”

Coop “Plant-based Food Report” (in German): revue.link/plantbased

Swiss Meat Substitutes Report from the FOAG: revue.link/substitutes

European Food Trends Report from the Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute: revue.link/foodtrends

Proviande meat market figures (only in French and German): revue.link/fleisch

Emil Steinberger



Emil Steinberger, known simply as “Emil”, celebrated his 90th birthday in January. The Lucerne native remains Switzerland’s most successful and best-loved comedian. Emil has been making most of the country laugh since the 1970s, his popular appeal spanning the demographic and political spectrum – a trick that would seem impossible these days. His stage and television performances, as well as a “sabbatical” year in the Knie circus ring, are ingrained in our collective memory. Many of us can still recite some of Emil’s famous sketches by heart – police headquarters, telegraph office, mountain guide, country sayings, or the father with the “Swedish model” pram. The comedian, who began working life as a postal worker, has always relied on minimal props, his facial expressions, gestures and words sufficient to leave his audience rolling in the aisles. Explaining Steinberger’s past success, which extends to Germany, the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” wrote: “Emil embodies something quintessentially Swiss. Not just a certain awkwardness, but also that small man on the street struggling to cope with the finer details of life. Although his humour is never mocking.” Steinberger’s role in “Die Schweizermacher”, the hit film parodying Switzerland’s tough naturalisation rules, is unforgettable too. At the age of 60, Emil left Switzerland to live in New York. He returned to Switzerland – and to the stage – in 1999. His most recent tour ended last December. Steinberger now resides in Basel. He opened an account on Twitter a couple of years ago and continues to be his happy-go-lucky, kind-spirited self. “Total strangers have told me how I have been an influence in their life,” he recently said in an interview. “Others say they mimic me when they are at home.” Emil never wanted this attention. “All I wanted was to perform and make people laugh.”

SUSANNE WENGER

UBS acquires Credit Suisse; the federal government and the SNB plough billions into the deal

Big bank Credit Suisse (CS) is no more after being taken over by its rival UBS – the outcome of a highly volatile week in March for the Swiss banking sector. The merger almost feels like a shotgun wedding. According to the UBS board, it was necessary to stave off disaster for the Swiss banking sector and the Swiss economy. Faith in CS had collapsed over a dramatic few days at the beginning of March, as customers and investors started withdrawing billions of Swiss francs from the bank. In addition to home-made problems, the plight of certain US banks further drained confidence. On 16 March, the Swiss National Bank (SNB) granted CS an emergency loan of 50 billion Swiss francs. The intervention was of little use, with the Federal Council and the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority (FINMA) eventually forcing CS and UBS executives to the negotiating table on 19 March. By that Sunday evening, UBS had acquired CS for the sum of three billion francs. Finance Minister Karin Keller-Sutter has sold the takeover as a private-sector deal for the greater good. Nevertheless, it is another government bailout in all but name, albeit with the indirect involvement of another bank. The government and the SNB have pledged as much as 250 billion francs to backstop the sale, while the government has invoked emergency legislation to provide a further 9 billion in loss guarantees. CS’s demise as an independent entity is a historic moment. Founded as Schweizerische Kreditanstalt (SKB) in 1856 by railway pioneer Alfred Escher, the bank played a key role in building up Switzerland’s modern infrastructure.

(MUL)

A call for greater urgency on climate change

The world must act faster on climate change, according to the latest scientific report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Presenting its findings in Interlaken (canton of Berne), the IPCC said that the risks posed by global warming are even greater than they were when the previous IPCC report was published nine years ago. Relatively small temperature rises can now lead to more extreme events like droughts and flooding. Limiting global warming to 1.5°C or well below 2°C is the goal, but more effort is needed from countries around the world – including Switzerland. More on pages 10 and 11.

(TP)

Marco Odermatt sets new points record

In winning this year’s Men’s Overall World Cup, Swiss skier Marco Odermatt set a new record by becoming the first man to collect over 2,000 World Cup points in one season. Odermatt, 25, skied consistently well to break the previous points mark that had stood for over 20 years. He claimed 22 podium finishes in 26 races.

(MUL)

Finally – a fresh attempt at e-voting

The cantons of Basel-Stadt, St Gallen and Thurgau are to launch new e-voting pilots in June. If these trials go well, the new system could be used in the national elections in autumn.

EVELINE RUTZ

The digital ballot box is set to make its Swiss comeback on 18 June, when the cantons of Basel-Stadt, St Gallen and Thurgau are to pilot e-voting, enabling up to 65,000 people to vote online – including Swiss Abroad. The Federal Council has given the three cantons the green light to conduct a limited trial. Grisons intends to start its own pilot in 2024.

Shortcomings have been rectified

The risks are at an acceptable level, Federal Chancellor Walter Thurnherr told the media in March. “E-voting systems incorporate effective anti-fraud mechanisms. Any attempts to hack them can be detected with a high degree of certainty.”

Swiss Post now meets the high security standards necessary for online voting, having made significant improvements since 2019, when e-voting was discontinued (see “Swiss Review”, April 2021 and August 2022). Since 2021, hackers around the world have been invited to put the solution through its paces. The Swiss Post system is continually monitored by independent experts and is fully verifiable. This means that anyone who votes online can check whether their vote has been registered correctly. The pilot itself will help to improve e-voting, stressed Thurnherr. “Certain findings are only possible once you put a system into practice.”

The cantons are delighted to be offering e-voting again on a trial basis. After over 300 successful tests, we are picking up where we left off in 2019, says Barbara Schüpbach-Guggenbühl, Chancellor of the canton of Basel-Stadt, adding that they are responding to a significant need among Swiss Abroad and among voters with physical and/or mental impairments.

“A digital means of voting is vital for these people to be able to exercise their democratic rights effectively.”

The pilots entail considerable preparation and costs for the cantons involved. But Schüpbach-Guggenbühl firmly believes the time and expense will pay off. Switzerland’s federal system must future-proof itself to maintain current levels of political participation. “Government stakeholders need to offer added value to ensure that people engage with democracy, now and in the future.”

Postal delivery of security codes to continue

Not all of the pilot will be digital in nature, because the selected participants will receive their individual security codes – together with the usual voting papers – by post. This is relevant to Swiss Abroad, who have to wait longer for their papers to arrive. But online voting foregoes the need to return everything by post, enabling expats to cast their vote in just a few clicks. The introduction of an e-ID scheme could simplify the process in future, with e-voting function-

The risks associated with the new e-voting system are at an acceptable level, says Federal Chancellor Walter Thurnherr. Any attempts to hack the system would, in all likelihood, be detected.
Photo: Keystone



ing seamlessly on a purely electronic basis without the need to use postal delivery at all.

Swiss Post is responding to the digital revolution, says its spokeswoman Silvana Grellmann. “We want to bring the secrecy of correspondence into the virtual world.” Switzerland’s national postal service employs over 1,700 people in its IT department. At its Neuchâtel site, it has set up a cryptography hub currently comprising 47 staff. Grellmann: “Security is a never-ending process.” Swiss Post will continue to use the “collective intelligence of experts” to iron out glitches. It will also be transparent in reporting vulnerabilities, with the aim of building public trust in the e-voting system.

If the 18 June pilots are successful, the cantons could offer e-voting in autumn’s federal elections. They would first have to submit an application to the federal government.

The “Fifth Switzerland” wants to exercise its political rights

This is positive news for the “Fifth Switzerland”, according to Ariane Rustichelli, Director of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA). The Swiss are increasingly mobile, she says, with more expats – currently some 220,000 – listed in the voting register every year. People also tend to be staying abroad for shorter periods of time on average, so it is all the more important that Swiss Abroad are able to participate in the democratic process. “E-voting helps them to maintain the link with home.” Rustichelli hopes that the pilots are a success. “Then we can resume trials in other cantons.”



Switzerland to deliver on a long-standing climate pledge – depending on what voters say

More than seven years on from the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, the Federal Council and parliament have approved a climate bill. On 18 June, voters will decide whether the legislation comes into force. The SVP opposes the new law.

THEODORA PETER

December 2015 was a “historic step” – the moment when the international community agreed in Paris to work together to combat climate change and its devastating consequences. The aim was to limit global warming to well below 2°C. To achieve this ambitious goal, the world must substantially reduce environmentally harmful greenhouse gas emissions such as CO₂ within the next few decades.

The euphoria of Paris has faded over the years. Many countries have fallen behind their emissions targets. The pandemic, the war in Ukraine,

and the energy crisis have shifted priorities. Political efforts to fight climate change have also stalled in Switzerland. Voters most recently rejected a beefed-up CO₂ Act in 2021, which would have introduced a green levy on fossil fuels (see “Swiss Review” 4/2021).

Carbon neutral by 2050

Heat waves and extreme weather continue to illustrate how urgently action needs to be taken. The sustained acceleration in the glacier melt rate has become the poster child of climate

change in Switzerland. Researchers predict that most ice masses in the Alps will have been lost by the end of this century. But there is still time to curb global warming, say scientists.

The Federal Council and parliament have now agreed on framework legislation that sets out the path to Switzerland reaching net zero by 2050. The bill calls for harmful greenhouse gas emissions to be cut in stages. Specific reduction targets will apply to industry, motorised traffic, and buildings.

Massive investment in zero-carbon technology will be needed. To

An alarming sight on the Bernina mountain range – narrow strips of ice are all there is left of the Diavolezza Glacier. In summer, these are protected under white plastic sheets. Photo: Keystone

this end, parliament has approved a stimulus programme worth 3.2 billion Swiss francs, of which 2 billion will go into replacing oil and gas heating over a ten-year period. A further 1.2 billion will be used to promote innovation.

Pressure from the Glacier Initiative

The draft law is a counterproposal to the so-called Glacier Initiative, which the cross-party Swiss Climate Protection Association launched at the beginning of 2019, collecting the necessary 100,000 signatures within just a short space of time. Faced with grassroots pressure, parliament decided to act. Its bill is acceptable to the climate activists, who have since withdrawn their initiative. However, if parliament's counterproposal fails at the ballot box on 18 June, the Glacier Initiative could still be put to voters at a later juncture.

The sustained acceleration in the glacier melt rate has become the poster child of climate change in Switzerland.

Despite broad-based support in parliament, not all the political parties agree with the climate change legislation. The SVP calls it the “energy-guzzling act” and has initiated the 18 June referendum, claiming that energy consumption will increase dra-

matically if people are forced to drive electric cars in future and fit their homes with electric heat pumps. Switzerland cannot generate enough electricity as it is, it adds. Opponents of the bill also say that property owners who eventually replace oil and gas will be hit with extra costs. Supporters, on the other hand, point to public-sector investment in renewables such as solar, hydro, and wind.

Special focus on solar and hydro

Notwithstanding climate change legislation, parliament last autumn approved an amendment to the Energy Act, which will speed up the construction of solar farms like the one being planned in the canton of Valais (see “Swiss Review” 1/2023).

Furthermore, the National Council and the Council of States are currently debating legislation to ensure electricity security. The aim is for Switzerland to produce more energy from renewable sources – particularly hydropower. Berne has identified 15 dam projects to provide additional electricity in winter especially. One of these would be the construction of a reservoir below the Trift Glacier (see “Swiss Review” 1/2022). Critics fear that nature conservation will suffer as a result. Hence, there is a distinct possibility of this issue being put to voters too.

But first we have the climate referendum on 18 June, which will also be the first major test for the new energy and environment minister, Albert Rösti (SVP). In his former capacity as a National Councillor and a lobbyist for the oil industry, Rösti was one of the leading figures opposing the shift away from fossil fuel. In his role as Federal Councillor, he must now defend the climate bill – against the will of his own party.

Overview of all federal votes on 18 June 2023

Global minimum tax for multinationals

As a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Switzerland has agreed to implement a global minimum tax on large businesses from 2024 onwards. A 15 per cent minimum levy will apply to multinationals that generate over 750 million Swiss francs in annual sales. Many major companies in Switzerland will consequently have to pay more, thereby creating additional revenue for the public purse. Support for this international mechanism is unanimous. However, there is disagreement over how to distribute the extra money. According to the allocation formula adopted by parliament, three quarters of the additional tax income will go to the cantons and only one quarter to the federal government. The SP recommends a No vote and wants more money to remain in the federal coffers. (TP)

Legislation to combat climate change and invest in renewable energy

Switzerland aims to become carbon-neutral by 2050. The Federal Act on Climate Protection Goals, Innovation and Strengthening Energy Security (see article on the left) sets out the path to achieving this goal, and is an indirect counterproposal to the cross-party Glacier Initiative, which has now been withdrawn. The SVP opposes the new legislation. (TP)

Covid-19 Act back under scrutiny

Despite Covid restrictions having ended, parliament has extended the Covid-19 Act until the end of 2024 as a precautionary measure. This means that the legal basis for reactivating the Covid vaccine passport requirement – e.g. for travel to other countries – continues to apply for the time being. The Friends of the Constitution pressure group opposes the extension and has now initiated its third referendum on the law. (TP)

Online guidance for voters ahead of the federal elections

The federal elections on 22 October will again see thousands of candidates contesting the 246 seats in parliament. With so many politicians to choose from, it can be hard to see the wood for the trees. Online platforms like Smartvote help you to make an informed decision.

THEODORA PETER

The actual number of men and women standing for election will become clear in August, when the deadline for nominations expires in Switzerland's 26 cantons. The current record number of candidates, set in 2019, could well be broken this year. The last federal elections saw more than 4,600 candidates fighting over 200 seats in the National Council, while more than 200 people stood for the 46 seats available in the Council of States.

Voters, for their part, can expect to receive a large envelope through the post this autumn. This item will not only include the relevant election lists but also numerous campaign leaflets. So much election literature can be slightly daunting.

Cantonal variation

The size of the envelope will depend not least on the canton in which you are entitled to vote. The Swiss Abroad are no exception in this regard. In the two most populous cantons, Zurich and Berne, 36 and 24 National Council seats are up for grabs respectively. The quota varies between 19 and seven seats for mid-sized cantons, and between six and one for the least populous cantons. Then you have the Council of States, where candidates contest one and two seats per canton.

Even voters in smaller cantons are spoilt for choice, with party nominations still far outstripping the number of available seats. And unlike in municipal elections, when candidates are often the man or woman next door, those running for election at federal level could come from the opposite corner of the canton.

Regardless of distance, filling in a ballot paper is a democratic right that takes more than a little thought.



How do I find out which parties and candidates best represent my own political views?

Smartvote questionnaire and spider graph

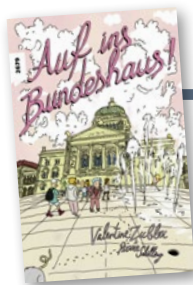
If you are happy to invest a bit of time into making the right choice, you can do worse than register on Smartvote.ch – an expert-driven system that works like an online dating site. The Smartvote platform asks you to respond to a range of questions that have already been answered by the election candidates. Instead of being personal, the questions cover key issues in Swiss politics – such as pension provision, health insurance premiums, taxation, the environment, and immigration. At the end, a list of matches pops up on screen – these are the names of candidates whose policies measure up best to your own views in percentage terms. You can also view a “smartspider”: a spider graph that visualises your political preferences along eight thematic axes (see page 13 for two examples).

According to Smartvote project manager Michael Erne, a reworked version of the questionnaire will be ready by the summer in time for the 2023 elections. To allow comparison with previous elections, most of the 75 questions will remain the same or just be updated. About a quarter of them will be completely new. “Themes like security, neutrality, and purchasing power have taken on greater importance in these elections due to the war in Ukraine, and because of inflation,” explains Erne. There is also more emphasis on digitalisation, which affects all areas of life.

New version online from the end of August

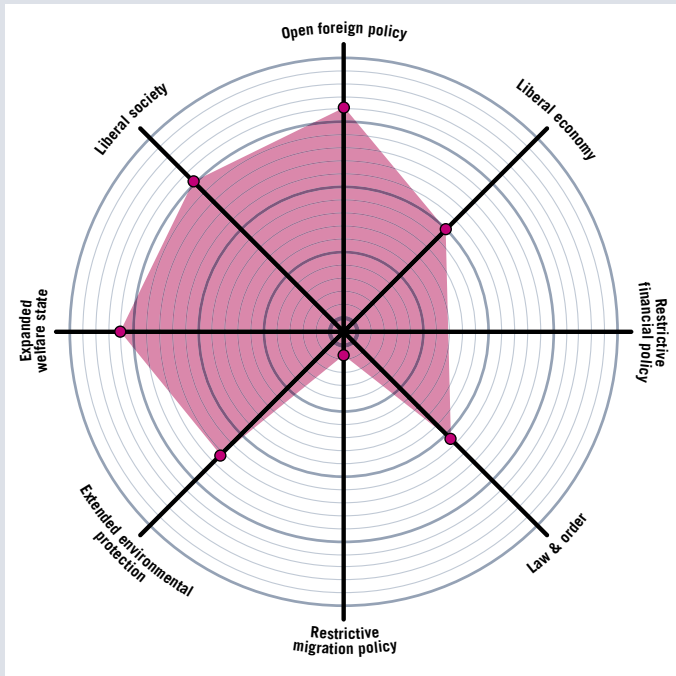
This spring, the public were able to submit their own theme-related input. A dedicated interface called “BePart” was set up for this purpose, says Erne. The platform received around 200 submissions, including questions such as “Should Switzerland allow other countries to re-export Swiss-manufactured weapons and ammunition?” and “Are you in favour of Switzerland joining the EEA?” Suggestions from the public, as well as input from politicians and academics, will be used to improve Smartvote. Following a trial period, the new questionnaire will eventually go online at the end of August. Anyone who wishes to test out the platform before then can access the online questionnaire for the 2019 national elections.

Four years ago, the platform was used by 500,000 to 600,000 voters, or 20 per cent of the total turnout at the ballot box. Smartvote is also popular among the election candidates themselves, 85 per cent of whom completed the questionnaire in the 2019 elections. It makes sense that politicians want to feature on the platform.



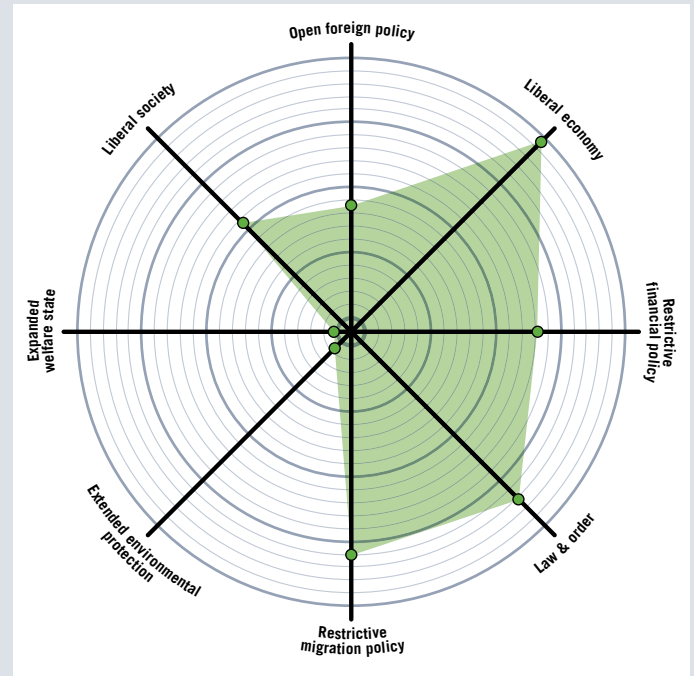
Federal politics for children

Around 100,000 people visit the Federal Palace in Berne every year. Many of them belong to school classes, who go on guided tours and watch the parliamentary debates live in the National Council and Council of States. In 2022, the Swiss youth literature foundation SJW published “Auf ins Bundeshaus!”/“Les souris du Palais fédéral” – an illustrated story about a girl called Melissa who smuggles her pet mouse Luna into the Federal Palace, causing no shortage of commotion. During their adventure through parliament, Melissa and Luna learn how politics works both in public and behind the scenes. (TP)



Left wing

The “smartspider” visualises a person’s political views and values along eight thematic axes. Candidate X in the above example wants an expanded welfare state and a liberal society. He also favours a progressive, EU-oriented foreign policy approach. In comparison, environmental issues play a somewhat less important role in his thinking. He completely disagrees with taking a more restrictive line on immigration. (TP)



Right wing

Candidate Y favours a liberal approach to economic policy, with as much deregulation and as little state intervention as possible. As the spider graph shows, she is just as keen on measures to improve law and order as she is on taking a more restrictive line on immigration. On the other hand, Candidate Y has no interest in expanding the welfare state or advocating environmental issues. (TP)

All but 15 per cent of candidates wanted to be included. According to Erne, the absentees tend to be “list fillers”, i.e. people who enter their name on the election list without expecting to be elected.

Easyvote – explanatory videos and app

easyvote.ch is another resource making it easier for people to exercise their right to vote. The umbrella organisation of Swiss youth parliaments developed easyvote.ch with the aim of encouraging political participation primarily among young people. The platform offers a good overview of forthcoming elections and popular

votes, with neutral, easy-to-understand content that will appeal to a wide range of people. For the federal elections, it has short videos explaining Switzerland’s two-chamber system and how to fill in a ballot paper correctly. There is also a dedicated app called Votenow, which is available for use on smartphone.

Ch.ch – election information from the Swiss authorities

Meanwhile, the Confederation and cantons offer www.ch.ch – a user-friendly one-stop shop of continually updated information on the federal elections. The site includes an election calendar, an overview of the

rules on standing for election and the rules on transparency around political funding, as well as an election glossary explaining technical terms such as “multiple candidacy” and “party vote”. In addition, the platform contains information on what to do if you are a Swiss Abroad and want to exercise your political rights in the elections.

www.smartvote.ch
www.easyvote.ch
www.ch.ch/de/wahlen2023/
www.elections-2023.ch

Switzerland's unhappy bunnies

In the Chinese zodiac, 2023 is the year of the rabbit (or hare). Chocolate bunnies are well-loved in Switzerland, but their natural counterparts in the wild are anything but happy bunnies.

MARC LETTAU

Easter is over for another year. Once again, chocolate bunnies of all shapes and sizes were a hit on the shelves. Swiss supermarket giant Migros produced 6.8 million of them alone at its Delica factory in Buchs (canton of St Gallen).

Country of the hare

China may have its year of the hare (known as 'year of the rabbit' in English), but Switzerland is – or used to be – the country of the hare. In German-speaking Switzerland in particular, countless addresses are named after our long-eared friends. Hasenacker, Hasenberg, Hasenbühl, Hasenburg, Hasenfeld, Hasengaden, Hasenhalden, Hasenmoos, Hasenplatte, Hasensprung, Hasental, Hasenstrick, and Hasenwinkel, to name but a few. Hares in Switzerland – specifically brown hares – used to hop around all over the place – and were hunted in droves.

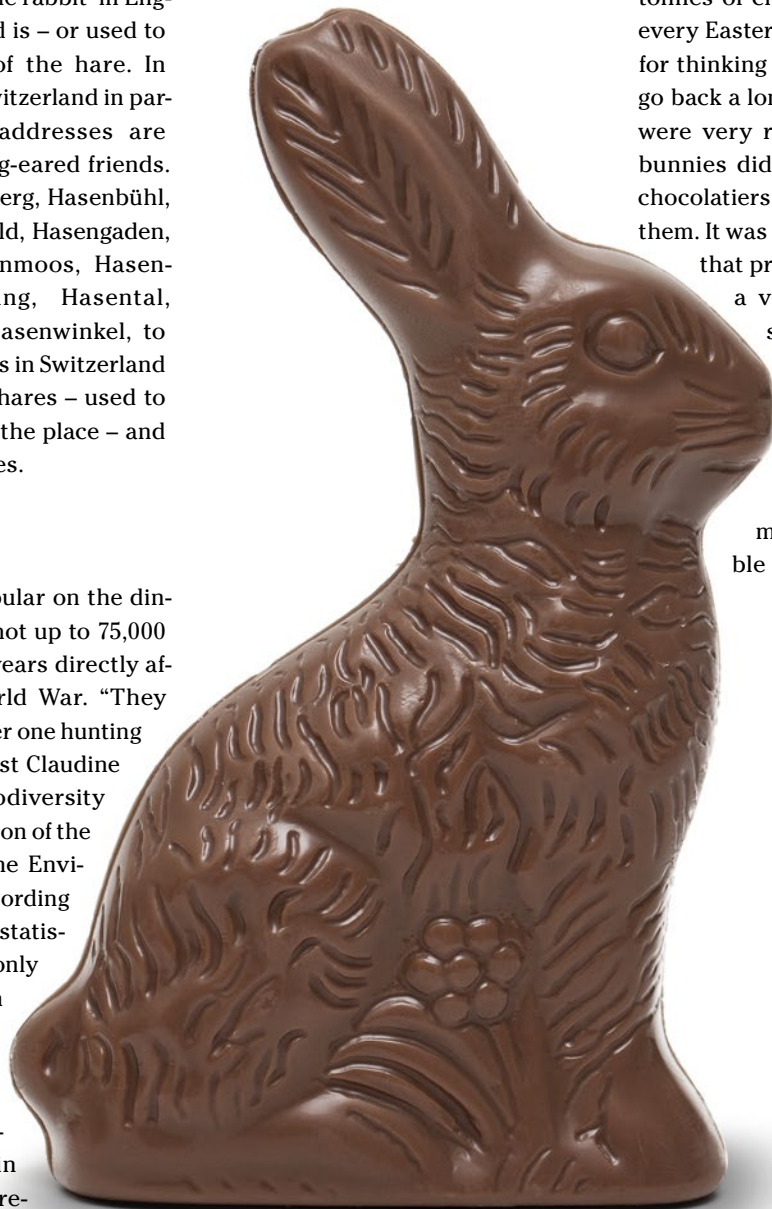
Decline

Hare used to be popular on the dinner plate. Hunters shot up to 75,000 brown hares in the years directly after the Second World War. "They used to be the number one hunting trophy," says biologist Claudine Winter from the Biodiversity and Landscape Division of the Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN). According to the latest hunting statistics for Switzerland, only around 1,500 brown hares are now shot each year. This is because hare numbers have plummeted – especially in the Central Plateau re-

gion. The Swiss brown hare monitoring survey, conducted since 1991 and covering selected areas of the country, illustrates how dramatic the situation has become. It is an exclusively downward trend, with the number of brown hares having halved again in the last three decades from an already low level to a very low level. Switzerland is currently home to an average of 2.5 brown hares per square

kilometre. On the other hand, the rise of the Easter bunny shows no sign of abating. On top of the millions of chocolate bunnies produced by Migros, rival Coop and all the other confectionery manufacturers produce millions more.

According to the Association of Swiss Chocolate Manufacturers, Chocosuisse, around 16 million leave the conveyor belt every year in Switzerland – two per capita – and 5,000 tonnes of chocolate are consumed every Easter. You would be forgiven for thinking that chocolate bunnies go back a long way, but these treats were very rare until 1950. Hollow bunnies did not even exist – until chocolatiers invented and perfected them. It was only about 50 years ago that production kicked in with a vengeance – starting a steep upward trend inversely proportional to the dwindling numbers of brown hares in the wild. Admittedly, the brown hare monitoring survey is unable to provide accurate in-



Most people in Switzerland rarely ever see brown hares. Chocolate bunnies are much more common, to put it mildly. Photo iStock



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

This edition:

The brown hare and the chocolate bunny – a tale of extremes

formation on the number of brown hares left in Switzerland because of its focus on selected areas of the country. Even the latest hunting statistics are of limited value; hare hunting is illegal in numerous cantons, because the animal is on the red list of endangered species. But there is still one relatively reliable if gruesome statistic documenting the sustained decline of the brown hare: the number of wild animals hit and killed by cars and agricultural machinery. Hares accounted for around 4,000 such deaths in the 1980s. Nowadays, the figure is only about 1,000.

Bad habitat

Brown hares lead a particularly precarious existence in Switzerland's Central Plateau region. "Things are not looking good at all for brown hares in the flatter, most intensely farmed parts of the country," says Claudine Winter. Amid vast swathes of agricultural land, there are insufficient hedgerows and other biodiversity-enhancing boundaries for hares to shelter their young. Out in the open, they are an easy catch for foxes, wildcats, and birds of prey. Specific farming practices have also led to their decimation. Winter: "If farmers waited until as late as possible to mow their fields, this would help to protect hares – and roe deer too." But there are no regulations in Switzerland to encourage this practice.

Does the plight of the brown hare have any bearing on children's Easter experience? Barely, given that chocolate bunnies are the first members of the Leporidae family that many will ever see. Even in neighbourhoods like Hasenbühl or Hasenacker, the

likelihood of seeing a brown hare is extremely low to zero. Residential areas are completely alien to hares. Foxes are becoming much more common in built-up areas.

Prolific

Hares are seen as fertility symbols. The female can bear offspring up to four times a year. Indeed, few other wild animals breed as prolifically when the habitat is right. Nevertheless, it is the chocolatiers who hold the record: Lindt & Sprüngli produces around 150 million of its iconic Gold Bunnies every year around the world.

The ancestors of the brown hares that still live in Switzerland originally came from the steppes of Ukraine and southern Russia. They made their way over in the Neolithic period – along with crop farming.

Photo: iStock



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Short and sweet

“Swiss Review”, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 49th year of publication and is published six times a year in German, French, English and Spanish in 13 regional editions. It has a total circulation of 431,000, including 253,000 electronic copies.

“Swiss Review”'s 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.

All Swiss Abroad who are registered with a Swiss representation receive the magazine free of charge. Anyone else can subscribe for an annual fee (Switzerland: CHF 30 / abroad: CHF 50).

ONLINE EDITION
www.revue.ch

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The “Swiss Review” is published by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA). The postal address of the publisher, the editorial office and advertising department is: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne.
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CH97 0079 0016 1294 4609 8 / KBBECH22

COPY DEADLINE FOR THIS EDITION
15 March 2023

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+33 %

More and more Swiss are acquiring a sweet tooth – much to the delight of Switzerland’s confectionery manufacturers, who managed to sell 33 per cent more in 2022 than they did in the pandemic-affected year of 2021. Luckily, Switzerland is not the only market for selling sweets: 86 per cent of Swiss-made confectionery is exported, the biggest recipient being the US.

-13 %

The average Swiss consumes around 100 g of sugar per day – double the maximum amount recommended by the World Health Organization. Both government and industry want to reduce the amount of sugar in food and drink, and have already achieved some success in this regard: within five years, sugar content has fallen by 13 per cent in breakfast cereals and by 6 per cent in yoghurts.

+ 50 000 000 000

In mid-March, the Swiss National Bank (SNB) agreed a credit injection of 50 billion Swiss francs for the beleaguered big bank Credit Suisse (CS) (see page 8) to keep the markets sweet. In light of this remarkable liquidity injection, we wonder how much money we could squeeze out of the SNB if this magazine fell on hard times.



The Matterhorn is unique. Until recently, images of the iconic mountain adorned Toblerone bars. Those days are now over. As Toblerone is moving some production from Switzerland to Slovakia, the bar with the triangular chocolate chunks must do without the Matterhorn’s silhouette on its packaging. It’s Toblergone! The branding will feature a generic Alpine peak instead.



+25 %

After so much sugar, let’s do mushrooms. But please, please do not eat these lovely green specimens under any circumstances. The aptly named death cap is one of the most poisonous toadstools in Switzerland. No joke. Many wannabe mushroom pickers discovered their calling during the pandemic – and the number of mushroom poisonings subsequently increased by around 25 per cent in the fungi-friendly autumn of 2022. Better stick with sweets.

Electric car sales are booming in Switzerland

Sales of electric cars in Switzerland are rising sharply. This trend mirrors that seen in solar energy. Switzerland is subsidising the transition, but is not regulating the sale of electric SUVs.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

In ten years' time, Swiss towns and cities may be free from the fine particles and other gas pollution generated by cars that run on petrol and diesel. A new fleet of vehicles, electric this time, will be driving without emitting any CO₂. "The literature shows that electric vehicles are the best option currently available in terms of significantly reducing the CO₂ emissions associated with private mobility," states Professor Mario Paolone, who runs the distributed electric systems laboratory at EPFL. Despite Switzerland's reluctance to legislate on the weight and CO₂ emissions of vehicles, the country is advancing in strides. "It is making the transition more quickly than many other European countries," stresses the expert. This is despite the fact that Norway, which has now achieved over 90 percent electrification, achieved Switzerland's level in 2014.

"Of all vehicles currently on Swiss roads, around 96 percent are petrol, diesel or hybrid vehicles that do not need recharging at an electrical station," says Laurent Pignot of Touring Club Suisse (TCS). But the growth in e-cars is real. Some 40,173 new electric cars were registered last

year, up 26.2 percent on 2021, according to the car importers' association auto-swiss. The market share occupied by electric vehicles was 17.8 percent of new cars in 2022, 13.3 percent in 2021, 8.2 in 2020 and 4.2 in 2019.

More efficient, simpler and more economical

An electric motor – which has 200 parts – uses one-third of the energy consumed by a vehicle fitted with a combustion engine, which has 2,000 parts. Rising oil prices and the worsening climate crisis are stimulating the transition to electric vehicles. "Only vehicles that emit no CO₂ will be eligible for registration in Switzerland from 2035," states the umbrella organisation Swiss eMobility. The organisation is campaigning for charging infrastructure to be set up across the country urgently. Swiss eMobility is pushing for CO₂ emissions to be taken into account in vehicle taxation. This is rarely the case at the moment. Vehicle taxes vary from one canton to another, and they have little impact on the choice of which car people buy. "In France, heavy and higher polluting vehicles are taxed



Increased electromobility means greater electricity consumption. This begs the question: how environmentally friendly are charging stations? The one pictured here near Oftringen (canton of Aargau) has a solar panel roof.
Photo: Keystone

very heavily at purchase, based on an exponential malus scheme that can involve penalties of up to 50,000 euros per car that emits more than 225 grammes of CO₂ per kilometre,” explains Luca Maillard, a specialist in vehicle evaluation at the Swiss Association for Transport and Environment (ATE).

Electrification in mobility is one of the solutions for achieving the zero overall carbon objective set by the Federal Council for 2050. However, the way to decarbonisation differs greatly among the actors in this debate. TCS is appealing to public authorities, saying that they should support the purchase of this type of vehicle and install private charging stations. ATE is saying the opposite. It recommends that incentives, such as exoneration from import tax, be abolished by 2025. It is also opposed to purchase incentives, such as when over 4,000 people in Valais qualified for a bonus of between 2,500 and 5,000 francs by purchasing an electric car. This system now only applies in Ticino.

Importers are getting around the CO₂ rules

ATE would like to see rules that would mean fewer polluting vehicles on sale, whether electric or not. It has condemned the system still in force in 2023, inspired by the European Union’s system, which allows importers to group their purchases together – both good and bad – in order to achieve the averages imposed by law (i.e. a maximum of 118 grammes of CO₂ per km). In 2020, Tesla sold over 6,000 vehicles with a target value of 0 grammes of CO₂. It had to concede this score to the Fiat-Chrysler group, which sold high-CO₂-emission vehicles while limiting the number of fines it received, according to ATE. These fines amounted to 100 million francs in 2021. “But these penalties have little effect on SUV sales, given the large profit margins on this type of vehicle,” comments Luca Maillard, who reveals that over half of the electric vehicles sold are SUVs. These models, listed as 0 grammes CO₂, are powered by batteries that can weigh up to 700 kilos. Each vehicle’s total weight is 2.5 tonnes. Allowing these behemoths onto the roads would cancel out any ecological advantage, since the grey energy required to manufacture them, as well as their power rating, more than offset the benefits. Mario Paolone counters this, “Broadly speaking, an e-tank [an electric SUV] is considerably more efficient and less polluting than a small car with a combustion engine, especially if the car is recharged using renewable resources”. The average electric car in Switzerland emits the equivalent of 20 g of CO₂ per

A piece of spodumene. The environmentally dubious practice of mining for minerals like spodumene, from which the alkali metal lithium is extracted, is one of the downsides of electromobility. Photo: Keystone



km, according to ATE. This score is compatible with Switzerland’s electric power mix, a significant portion of which is renewable energy. It is six times better than Poland’s score, for example. If you include all the expenses, an electric car costs the same as a petrol car. The real benefit is ecological: electric vehicles substantially reduce their carbon footprint after they have been driven for around 30,000 kilometres, although their initial footprint is worse than a petrol car’s. This footprint improves even further when the houses or buildings associated with the cars are fitted with solar panels. “You can drive on solar power and fully charge your car for four francs,” reckons Valais engineer Arnaud Zufferey.

The issue of lithium and how to recycle it

“For the time being, the electrification of mobility has had no noticeable positive effect on the environment,” in the view of ATE, which is campaigning for greater development of active mobility and public transport. The other question involves the materials necessary for manufacturing the batteries. There is no global shortage of lithium; it is the mining and transporting of it that causes the pollution, according to experts. The solution to these serious environmental and social issues lies in recycling the batteries. The EU has stipulated that between 70 and 95 percent of the metals found in batteries (cobalt, lead, lithium and nickel) should be recycled by 2035. What about the energy? The transition to a vehicle fleet comprising 70 percent e-cars would lead to a 7 TWh higher demand for energy. Current total demand for electricity in Switzerland is 60 TWh, according to an international study published in 2022. “So, we are talking about an 11 percent increase by 2050. This is easily doable, especially if solar panels become widespread,” believes Paolone.

An enchanting flood of words and images

Remembering French-speaking Swiss author Catherine Colomb (1892–1965)



Catherine Colomb
(1892–1965)

CHARLES LINSMAYER

When the Lausanne “Gilde du livre” competition jury consisting of Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz, Gustave Roud, Edmond Jaloux and Paul Budry received a copy of the novel “Chemins de mémoire” (Memory lane) from a certain Catherine Charrière in 1944, Paul Budry immediately identified the typescript as being that of Catherine Tissot, who had won the “Patrie Suisse” magazine competition in 1932 with a book called “Trop de mémoire” (Too much memory). This earlier work – the story of two women who let their imaginations go, reminiscing about their childhood despite the world essentially having “no place for dreamers like them” – was published in 1934 by Attinger in Neuchâtel under the vaguer title of “Pile ou face” (Heads or tails). To avoid confusion with the previous work, “Chemins de mémoire” also had a completely different title when the “Gilde du livre” published the novel in 1945. Acknowledging the castle on the shores of Lake Geneva where the author (and her characters) spent their childhood, the publisher christened the book “Châteaux en enfance” (Childhood castles). This was only possible after the author had disclosed her real identity.

Time in Britain

The author’s real name was Marie-Louise Reymond. Born on 18 August 1892 in Saint-Prex, she was the wife of a Lausanne lawyer and the mother of two children. Catherine Colomb was her maiden name. After finishing her university studies in Lausanne in 1916, she went to Britain to do a doctorate. It was there that she caught the whiff of blue blood, discovered Virginia Woolf and, in 1921, secretly started to write books – after marrying her husband and dropping

“Chanoz left the care home, purchased some tatty bric-a-brac and set up shop on the cobbles among the fuchsia. Children dressed in traditional shawls stood there gawping at him as he laid out gold-headed needles, soap in light-green wrapping, and bootlaces. There were countless bootlaces. Enough for anyone to strangle all the mute people of Louis Laroche’s harem.”

(Excerpt from “Châteaux en enfance” in “Tout Catherine Colomb”, Éditions ZOE, Geneva, 2019)

out of her doctoral studies. Her third book, published in 1953, now under the Catherine Colomb pseudonym, lamented a long-lost childhood from the perspective of death, employing vivid imagery and almost no linear narrative. For the first time, the publisher (Éditions Rencontre) retained the author’s original book name, “Les Esprits de la terre” (English translation by John Taylor: “The Spirits of the Earth”, 2016).

Time of the angels

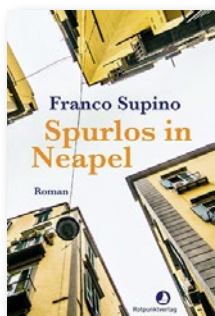
Another nine years passed before Catherine Colomb finally achieved literary renown, when “Le Temps des anges” (Time of the angels) was published by Gallimard in Paris, three years before the author died on 13 November 1965 at the age of 73. “Joseph woke to the steady whoosh of angels flapping their mighty wings” is how the novel opens. And the similar sound of waves lapping on to the shores of Lake Geneva persists throughout the book, lending a gentle, muffled rhythm to a horrific narrative of hate, deception, and murderous intent.

As in Catherine Colomb’s other books, the story is a fascinating journey down memory lane –and surprisingly reminiscent of the works of such authors as Gerhard Meier and Gertrud Leutenegger. “Le Temps des anges” conjures up a flood of words and images that shine through its dark, bitter subject matter and lack of linearity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: “The Spirits of the Earth” is available from Seagull Books. Catherine Colomb’s complete works are available in French from Édition Zoé, under the title “Tout Catherine Colomb”.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST BASED IN ZÜRICH

Lost in Naples



FRANCO SUPINO
"Spurlos in Neapel".
novel, Rotpunktverlag
Zurich 2022, 254 pages,
CHF 33.00.

The ground below Naples is in a constant state of flux. Tectonic plates rub together, creating tension that translates into the city's chaotic, highly strung nature. This particularly appeals to Franco Supino, whose parents hail from the Neapolitan hinterland. The first-person narrative in Supino's latest novel, "Spurlos in Neapel" (Lost in Naples), is that of a Swiss author visiting the city in the shadow of Mount Vesuvius.

Ostensibly, the author wants to get fitted for a suit at a "master tailor". But he also has a second, secret objective in mind: to track down an elusive mafioso called Antonio Esposito. His periodic visits to the tailor involve working out the whereabouts of 'o Nirone, as Esposito is nicknamed on account of his dark complexion. The narrator, an upstanding gentleman, finds no shortage of locals peddling stories about 'o Nirone – the Camorra can always rely on Neapolitan hearsay and bravado to slip quietly into the shadows, a friend tells him. The mafia are part local heroes, part criminals and part myth.

Slowly but surely, the narrator gets closer to the mysterious 'o Nirone. But how to explain the dark skin of a "conventional" Camorrista? The narrator flips this question and wonders what would have happened to him had his parents stayed in or returned to Naples. The search for 'o Nirone subsequently turns into a retrospective of his own life. He not only remembers his parents' early summer trips "back home", but also the political clamour in Switzerland for Italian migrants to be sent "back where they came from".

"Searching for your own reflection in a complete stranger is anything but a harmless game," says the narrator, summing up the existential crux of the novel. The mafioso holds up a mirror to how the narrator's own life could have been. "Spurlos in Neapel" is a cleverly composed story that flits between reality and fiction. Its autobiographical traits also tell of the fascination of Naples, the city of Maradona, Pino Daniele, Massimo Troisi. "How do the places we grow up in shape our lives?" the narrator asks. And how different would things have turned out had he grown up not in Solothurn but in Naples? Deep down, we could all ask ourselves a similar question.

BEAT MAZENAUER

All about the journey



BENJAMIN BRITTEN
"Our Hunting Fathers
Quatre Chansons
françaises", Symphonic
Suite from "Gloriana"
Prospero Classical 2022

Basel is well known as a city of art. But it is first and foremost a city of music, boasting as many as four different orchestras of international standing. La Cetra specialises in baroque music, and the Basel Sinfonietta in contemporary music. The Basel Chamber Orchestra has a wide-ranging repertoire, while Sinfonieorchester Basel plays opera as well as major symphonies.

Does a small city like Basel really need that many orchestras? Hans-Georg Hofmann smiles nonchalantly. The Basel Symphony Orchestra (BSO) artistic director says that all four ensembles are different in their own way. They do not compete with each other. They even have their own respective home venues. "We make music on behalf of the city

of Basel," he is quick to stress. "We are its orchestra." They march to a different beat in Basel. It is all about the journey, less about the destination.

Things look even rosier when you consider that the BSO now plays in one of Switzerland's most magnificent, visitor-friendly and acoustically pleasing concert halls, the Stadtcasino, which underwent a face-lift that was completed by architects Herzog & de Meuron in 2020.

Whisper it, but the BSO itself is also going through a period of renewal, with Markus Poschner (born in 1971) having been elected its new chief conductor in February. The BSO had been on the lookout for a new maestro for quite some time, and has now made an excellent choice. Poschner, who comes from Munich, made a triumphant debut in Bayreuth last summer and has been doing sterling work as the principal conductor of the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana. He also has enjoyed some surprising success on CD.

The BSO is not averse to making its own CD recordings either. It also attracts 60,000 listeners every month on Spotify – proof that rare masterpieces from composers like Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924) and Charles Koechlin (1967–1950) have a keen audience. Its CD release containing Benjamin Britten's "Gloriana" suite and other pieces hit a nerve worldwide in September 2022 following the death of Queen Elizabeth II. The "Gloriana" suite comes from the eponymous opera, which Britten wrote for the late monarch's coronation. Meanwhile, the BSO is perfectly happy to let other orchestras play Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 4 for the umpteenth time instead.

CHRISTIAN BERZINS

A promise at her stepfather's deathbed

Agnes Hirschi from Berne escaped the Holocaust in Hungary as a child – thanks to the Swiss diplomat Carl Lutz, who later became her stepfather. She is now fulfilling her pledge to tell others about what Lutz did in saving her and thousands of others from Nazi brutality.

SUSANNE WENGER

It was winter 1944/45 and a battle was raging in German-occupied Budapest. Every time the air-raid siren sounded, six-year-old Agnes Hirschi held on to her doll and hurried into the dark, dank cellar with her mother. “We never left the cellar for two months after Christmas, because it was no longer safe at ground level,” she recalls. Hirschi is now 85 and lives near Berne. She is one of over 20 people profiled in a new book called “The Last Swiss Holocaust Survivors”. But what happened to her was different to the stories of those who survived the concentration camps. “I was lucky, because my mother and I found refuge,” she says.

It was diplomat Carl Lutz, Swiss Vice-Consul in Budapest from 1942 to 1945, who gave them refuge – and whose memory Hirschi wants to keep alive most of all. The cellar was at Lutz's own address, where little Agnes and her mother Magda Grausz were housed in the staff quarters. Magda, a young Hungarian Jew, was employed as housekeeper at the Swiss embassy. It was thanks to this working relationship that Lutz was able to protect her and her daughter from persecution by the Nazis and Hungarian fascists. Lutz became Agnes's stepfather after the war, after he and Magda fell in love and got married in 1949. It was the second marriage for both of them.

Courage in the face of barbarity

The newly-weds moved to Berne with Agnes after the war. Agnes learned German, went to school, completed commercial training, started her own family, worked as a journalist at the “*Berner Zeitung*”, and later got involved in the Reformed Church. The fact that she came from a Jewish fam-

“I was lucky, because my mother and I found refuge,” says Holocaust survivor Agnes Hirschi, 85.
Photo: Danielle Liniger



ily and had fled the Holocaust in Hungary was a secret she kept to herself for decades. And it was only gradually that she realised the scale of what her stepfather did in Budapest. Lutz not only saved her and her mother but prevented an estimated 50,000 Hungarian Jews from being deported, shot dead or sent on brutal death marches.

In his job at the Foreign Interests Service in the Swiss legation in Buda-

pest, Lutz was responsible for issuing visas to Jews emigrating to Palestine (a British protectorate at the time). He was able to take advantage of this. Following Germany's invasion of Hungary in March 1944, terrified Jewish men and women gathered in front of the Vice-Consul's bureau in Budapest, called the “Glass House”. The diplomat was at his wit's end. What should he do? After wrestling with his conscience for a few days, he



developed a ruse that led to one of the largest civilian rescue operations of Jews during the Second World War.

Difficult homecoming

Lutz and his staff obtained permission to issue letters of protection to 8,000 Jews for emigration to Palestine. Interpreting the 8,000 not as persons, but as families, they issued tens of thousands of additional letters for many more, establishing 76 safe houses for them around Budapest. Lutz was not overtly daring, says Hirschi. “He was introverted and did not talk much.” Instead, the Appenzell-born diplomat was guided by his Methodist faith. Risking so much to deny the Nazis took a lot of out of him. But on returning to Switzerland after the war, all he heard in his home country was sniping and criticism. He was deeply disappointed, his stepdaughter says. But Hungary, the US, Germany, and Israel gave him the credit he deserved.

As Lutz lay on his deathbed in Berne in 1975, embittered and lonely, he asked his stepdaughter to promise that she would tell others about what he did and raise awareness among young people about the horrors of the Holocaust. Since retiring 20 years ago, Hirschi has been fulfilling the pledge she made to Lutz back then. She has travelled far and wide,

giving talks and spreading the message at exhibitions and events at home and abroad. Hirschi has consequently also met some of the people who were saved by her stepdad. In 2018, she and historian Charlotte Schallié published “Under Swiss Protection” – a book that retraces Lutz’s diplomatic wartime rescue efforts through the lens of Jewish eyewitness testimonies.

Talking to school children

It was only shortly before the book came out that Hirschi had also begun telling others about her own personal story. The first time was at an exhibition in Berne. It was a relief after having kept quiet for so long, she says.



“The Last Swiss Holocaust Survivors”

Portraits of Holocaust survivors who found a new life in Switzerland after the war.

Published by the Gamaraal Foundation/ Anita Winter. Stämpfli Verlag, 2023.

96 pages; CHF 30, EUR 39.

Digital exhibition:
www.gamaraal.com/exhibition

Switzerland remembers

Switzerland plans to build a national memorial to the victims of the Nazis, after parliament adopted a motion to this effect last year. This spring, the federal government is due to make an initial announcement on how it plans to implement the motion. In addition, there is currently a debate on whether to criminalise the public display of Nazi symbols like the swastika in Switzerland. The National Council Legal Affairs Committee expressed its support for the measure at the beginning of the year. It proposes creating special legislation to this end. (RED)

She has since been able to clear up a few grey areas. For example, she now knows more about her Jewish origins. But she also gets emotional talking about her life. Whenever she visits Swiss schools, she notices how keen the children are to ask her about her experiences. Carl Lutz’s heroics and the history of the Holocaust are of great interest to them, she says. Her work seems to be bearing fruit. “That pleases me.”

Her stepfather, the once forgotten saviour of so many Jews, has finally been honoured in Switzerland too. The federal government formally recognised his humanitarian actions in 1995. In 2018, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs dedicated a room to him at the Federal Palace, with Agnes Hirschi subsequently attending the inauguration of a commemorative plaque. Hirschi appreciates these efforts. “I only wish my stepfather had still been alive to appreciate them too.” She welcomes the fact that the planned memorial to Swiss Holocaust victims (see box) will also honour compatriots who helped those persecuted by the Nazis. For her part, Hirschi wants to continue informing and educating people – “for as long as I still can”.

Agnes Hirschi owes her life to the Swiss diplomat Carl Lutz. Lutz saved tens of thousands of Jews from persecution and murder. Swiss officialdom was slow to acknowledge his heroism.

Photo: Keystone

Switzerland in the UN Security Council

Switzerland recently took up a two-year seat on the UN Security Council. Its presence on the Council comes at a difficult juncture. Russia's war in Ukraine poses a huge challenge to a body tasked with maintaining world peace.

EVELINE RUTZ

People in war-torn Syria had to wait a long time for help to arrive following the earthquake in February. Only one border crossing from Turkey was open. This was due to ruler Bashar al-Assad's policy of insisting that all humanitarian aid be sent through Damascus – a set-up that allows him to monitor everything. “Not enough aid is reaching the men, women and children in need,” complained Swiss UN Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl a few days after the disaster. Under pressure from the UN Security Council, the Damascus regime eventually opened two further border crossings.

This episode shows the UN Security Council can mitigate humanitarian suffering in times of conflict. Switzerland has had a seat on the Security Council since the beginning of the year, its views being represented by Pascale Baeriswyl on a daily basis. The experienced diplomat has been heading the country's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York since 2020. Switzerland's term on the Security

Council runs until the end of 2024. Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis believes the country has “a major role to play” on the Council, bringing its experience to bear as a peaceful, multicultural nation and defending values such as freedom, democracy and the rule of law.

Overshadowed by the war in Ukraine

Switzerland is one of ten non-permanent members of the Security Council. The influential core of permanent members consists of the US, the UK, France, Russia, and China. All five permanent members have a veto, meaning that any one of them can block a Council decision, including resolutions against them.

When Russia marched into Ukraine in February 2022, the implications of this arrangement became clear. Suddenly, a prominent member of the Security Council was flouting the UN's core principles and violating international law. The Council was superfluous

and had failed to fulfil its original purpose of preserving world peace, said critics. And in the words of UN Secretary-General António Guterres, the world was on the verge of the abyss and heading in the wrong direction. Other Council members slammed Russia's actions and called on Vladimir Putin to end the killing. That was all they could do.

“Its preventive function is limited”

Indeed, the Council has limited scope. It can impose economic and diplomatic sanctions. It can also authorise military operations, provided individual members put soldiers on the ground.

“The Security Council is not fulfilling its purpose, considering that its primary task is to prevent war,” Baeriswyl told the Swiss public radio and television network SRF. This was most regrettable, she said. The Council's preventive function is limited, she added. Nevertheless, it can always play a mitigating role, authorising humanitarian corridors that have helped to save the lives of millions of people in the past.

“Neutrality does not mean a lack of solidarity”

Switzerland has four priorities during its two-year term on the Security Council: build sustainable peace, protect civilians, enhance effectiveness, and address climate security. It attaches great importance to upholding the values of the international community, said Federal Councillor Cassis last autumn in New York. Cassis strongly condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Switzerland may be a neutral country, he said, “but neutrality does not mean indifference or lack of solidarity”.

UN Ambassador Pascale Baeriswyl installs the Swiss flag at a ceremony to welcome Switzerland and four other non-permanent members to the Security Council. Photo: Keystone



Votes and Elections

Federal votes

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

The Federal Council decided that there will be three federal proposals submitted to the people on 18 June 2023:

- Federal Decree of 16 December 2022 on the Special Taxation of Multinational Enterprises (Implementation of OECD/ G20 Project on the Taxation of Multinational Enterprises) (BBI 2022 3216);
- Federal Act of 30 September 2022 on Climate Protection Goals, Innovation and Strengthening Energy Security (CIA) (BBI 2022 2403);
- Amendment of 16 December 2022 to the Federal Act of 25 September 2020 on the Statutory Principles for Federal Council Ordinances on Combating the COVID-19 Epidemic (COVID-19 Act) (AS 2022 817) – *At the time of going to press, it was not yet clear whether the issue would go to a referendum. Signatures were still in the process of being counted.*

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.



Popular initiatives

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

- Federal Popular Initiative 'Every kilowatt hour of Swiss renewable energy counts!' (14.08.2024)
- Federal Popular Initiative 'Inquiry into the background to the COVID-19 pandemic (Inquiry Initiative)' (28.08.2024)

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



Information

Notify your local Swiss representation of your email address and mobile phone number, or of changes to these. Register at the online desk of the FDFA via www.swissabroad.ch to select your preferred format for receiving "Swiss Review" and other publications. Both the latest and previous issues of "Swiss Review" are available to read and/or print out at any time via www.revue.ch. "Swiss Review" (or "Gazzetta Svizzera" in Italy) is delivered free of charge either electronically by email or as a print edition to the homes of all Swiss Abroad. It is also available via the iOS/Android app "Swiss Review".

Switzerland in your pocket

SwissInTouch.ch
The app for the Swiss abroad



swissintouch.ch



The FDFA and its partners – working together for you

The FDFA collaborates closely with a number of national partners outside the Swiss Federal Administration to provide support, information and high-quality services to the Swiss Abroad, the “Fifth Switzerland”. Its main partners introduce themselves.

The Swiss Confederation supports institutions that promote the links connecting the almost 800,000 Swiss Abroad to Switzerland in all manner of ways, by virtue of the mandate granted to it by the Federal Act on Swiss Persons and Institutions Abroad (SAA). Cooperation is required for this joint action, owing to the complexity of the growing needs and diversity of the Swiss diaspora. To this end, and in order to provide better support for expat compatriots, the Consular Directorate (CD) of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs may enter into service agreements with certain institutions. These institutions may also sign cooperation or collaboration agreements with each other. In addition, the CD works closely with other federal departments, cantonal bodies, foreign

authorities and other national and international partners.

The Consular Directorate, with its three divisions – Citizen Services, Consular Protection and Innovation and Partnerships – is a central contact point for efficient, customer-orientated consular services worldwide. It provides a wide range of consular services via its international network of consular offices, and this network is also in contact with the community of the Swiss Abroad and promotes mutual dialogue. It furthermore publishes important information on services like travel advice via conventional communication channels and the Travel Admin app. The FDFA Helpline has an advice and assistance service, which provides general information on stays abroad, emigration and re-

turning to Switzerland and for future retirees. The CD and its partners organise information sessions and themed webinars, and inform the Swiss community abroad through the “Swiss Review”, the “Gazzetta Svizzera” and the CD’s own application SwissInTouch, which was launched in late 2022.

Together, we are here for you, to protect your interests and provide high-quality services and information via modern multimedia channels to make sure that your needs are met.

Our main partners introduce themselves on the opposite page.

PAOLO BEZZOLA, CONSULAR DIRECTORATE, FDFA



Swiss living abroad – like Noël, Laurin and Flurina Frei in Ethiopia – can always rely on five key points of contact and sources of information: FDFA, OSA, swissinfo, educationsuisse and Soliswiss. Photo provided

Link to main FDFA page

with information on our consular services: revue.link/fdfa



Travel Admin

The travel app helps you to plan trips abroad and provides you with useful functions and information while you are travelling. revue.link/travel



Switzerland in your pocket: SwissInTouch

SwissInTouch, the app for the community of the Swiss Abroad. It promotes discussion and relations with Swiss official bodies and your Swiss representation abroad, is open to your needs and grants you direct and user-friendly access to important consular services and information. www.swissintouch.ch



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
www.eda.admin.ch

A strong voice for the “Fifth Switzerland” network

Some 800,000 Swiss nationals live and work abroad – and their numbers are growing. The “Fifth Switzerland” has many different concerns and needs. Swiss Abroad want to keep track of what is happening in Switzerland from a Swiss perspective. They look to engage and share insights with each other and have questions answered on the OASI state pension, e-voting, military service, and whether their qualifications will be recognised in Switzerland. They are interested in getting to know their home country (better) and playing a passive or active role in our country’s unique democratic system. The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) – also referred to as SwissCommunity – and its highest body, the Council of the Swiss Abroad, have been working on the behalf of the “Fifth Switzerland” since 1916 in collaboration with numerous partner organisations, including the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. Our independently produced magazine “Swiss Review”, our free legal advice, the Congress of the Swiss Abroad, youth holiday camps for young Swiss Abroad, our collaboration with the Swiss Abroad parliamentary group – these are some of the ways in which we inform, support, represent and engage with the Swiss Abroad.



Website: www.swisscommunity.org
Address: Swisscommunity,
Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3006 Berne,
Switzerland

The online media outlet for the “Fifth Switzerland”

SWI swissinfo.ch is Switzerland’s multilingual public-service online media outlet dedicated to the Swiss Abroad and to international audiences who are interested in Swiss affairs. We play an opinion-forming role for the Swiss Abroad, helping them to exercise their political rights in elections and popular votes as well as strengthening their attachment to Switzerland. Our platform summarises what is happening in your home country and everything you need to know about it. We have been collaborating with OSA for many years to reach our shared audience more effectively. Selected SWI swissinfo.ch content is now available via the OSA website. The SWIplus app and swissinfo.ch website provide in-depth information and analysis of Swiss politics, background stories for and about the “Fifth Switzerland”, Swiss news in brief, and daily briefings featuring input from other Swiss media outlets. Our new “Let’s Talk” format gives Swiss Abroad and representatives of opposing camps the opportunity to debate specific issues that are being brought to the ballot box. We also report on the deliberations of the Council of the Swiss Abroad and the Congress of the Swiss Abroad with news and analysis.



Website: www.swissinfo.ch
is a branch of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR)

educationsuisse umbrella organisation and advisory service

educationsuisse is the umbrella organisation of the 18 Swiss schools abroad that are recognised by the Swiss Confederation. educationsuisse advises and supports both young Swiss Abroad in addition to students from Swiss schools abroad, who wish to pursue their education or training in Switzerland. These topics have been at the heart of our association since 1942. Both functions are based on the Federal Act and Ordinance of Swiss Education Abroad.

Our office provides a wide range of services for the schools abroad, organises further training and supports the Swiss schools in recruiting Swiss teachers. Our advice on the topic of education in Switzerland is offered free of charge.

Networking in the Swiss education environment and public relations are important to us. We organise information events at the schools abroad and take part in events for the Swiss Abroad. We regularly publish articles on our topics in the magazine “Swiss Review” and in the “Gazzetta Svizzera”.

The synergies and the exchange of information with the partner organisations are extremely valuable.



Website: www.educationsuisse.ch
Address: educationsuisse,
Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3006 Berne,
Switzerland

Soliswiss – Your Switzerland abroad

Do I need to deregister from Switzerland before travelling around the world? Can I continue to pay into the OASI state pension scheme if I emigrate? Where can I open a bank account? We field questions like these every day. Since our foundation in 1958, we have been working to secure the livelihood of Swiss people abroad. Soliswiss is a cooperative with more than 4,000 members in over 130 countries. Membership is open all Swiss citizens abroad. Our primary focus is on providing individual advice on emigration, globetrotting, living and working abroad, and returning. We are committed to solidarity, and our advice for members is free of charge. In times of crisis, we can also provide members with quick, unbureaucratic support through our lump-sum compensation scheme and Auxiliary Relief Fund. Our website blog contains all sorts of useful information. You can also book a consultation easily online. We have a working agreement with the FDFA and are delighted to engage with any organisations assisting Swiss citizens abroad.



Website: www.soliswiss.ch
Address: Soliswiss, Effingerstrasse 45,
Postfach, CH-3001 Berne, Switzerland

St Gallen – the city of a thousand steps

From whiling away the time on the abbey square and enjoying views over to Lake Constance, to eating in charming taverns and learning about a unique textile heritage – St Gallen is always worth a visit.

JANINA GEHRIG *

Once you have passed Zurich, what comes next? Winterthur. Wil. Then St Gallen. The inhabitants of St Gallen sometimes have to explain themselves in this way to other people in Switzerland – and to themselves. Certainly, the city is a little off the beaten track. Tourists tend to bypass St Gallen, even though the city is eminently worth a trip – as is immediately apparent when you roll into the station and spot the Lokremise on the left-hand side. This building – a pioneering piece of rail infrastructure – is Switzerland's largest surviving circular locomotive depot. The Lokremise is now a multi-genre cultural centre and the venue of Eastern Switzerland's most important arthouse cinema. Leave the train and you will notice the big neon sign hanging over the eastern end of St Gallen's listed station hall. It reads "Chocolat Maestrani" – a reminder that exquisite confectionery used to be produced not far away. On reaching the top of the escalator, you will suddenly catch the aroma of bratwurst wafting in the air. St Gallen is famous in Switzerland for its sausages. The rule for eating St Gallen bratwurst is: no mustard.

An open-air lounge and a thousand steps

What else does this city of 80,000 people have to offer? Certainly the 111 beautifully

The legend behind the city name

An adventurous Irish monk called Gallus stumbled over a thorn bush in 612 AD at the waterfall at Mühleggschlucht gorge, not far from today's Gallusplatz square in the old town. He considered this a sign from God and decided to stay and establish a monastic cell. (JG)

preserved oriels (bay windows) overlooking the cobblestone streets of an old town endowed with a remarkable concentration of eateries and taverns. The area between Marktplatz and the abbey is a haven for pedestrians and home to the ubiquitous "Erststockbeizli", or "first-floor restaurants", which offer a variety of menus ranging from haute cuisine to more rustic local fare.

St Gallen also boasts an interesting climate and topography – with ski lifts situated just on the outskirts. The city is nestled lengthways between two hills: Rosenberg to the north and Freudenberg to the south. The Drei Weieren recreation area at the foot of Freudenberg in nearby St Georgen offers views of Lake Constance and Germany beyond. Countless steps lead to the top of both these hills, which is why St Gallen is also referred to as the "city of a thousand steps".

St Gallen is easy to explore on foot. From the railway station, you pass the Neumarkt shopping complex before reaching St Gallen's "open-air lounge", Roter Platz. Designed by artist Pipilotti Rist and architect Carlos Martinez, this space in the middle of the city has oversized lighting elements hanging above sofas, chairs, tables, couches and even a Porsche – all of which are covered in a spongy red tennis-court carpet.

UNESCO world heritage site

Now to the abbey district (Stiftsbezirk) – a UNESCO world heritage site that consists of the baroque Abbey Cathedral and the world-famous Abbey Library. The latter is not only Switzerland's oldest library but also one of the oldest and most important libraries in the world. Its valuable book collection documents the history of European culture as well as the cultural role of St Gallen Abbey from the eighth century until secularisation in 1805. The Egyptian mummy Shep-



en-Isis also lies within the library's baroque interior alongside her twin sarcophaguses. Debate is currently raging on whether to return Shep-en-Isis to Egypt (see "Swiss Review" 2/2023).

The white city

St Gallen also used to be called the "white city", says Walter Frei, an 87-year-old theologian known for his guided cultural heritage tours. This is not only because it snows more than in other Swiss cities, due to the higher altitude. It is also a nod to St Gallen's textile past. Local monks began weaving linen in the Middle Ages, laying the basis for prosperity. After cotton displaced linen in the 18th century, embroidery became the speciality instead. By around 1910, embroidery was Switzerland's number one export product, accounting for 18 per cent of the total value of everything sold abroad. Over 50 per cent of the global embroidery output at the time came from St Gallen. The Great Depression of 1929 put an abrupt end to this boom.

Finally, St Gallen has a lot of culture to offer. Apart from the Museum of Textiles, which is dedicated to the textile history of Eastern Switzerland and holds one of Switzerland's



The sumptuous baroque interior of the St Gallen Abbey Library, which belongs to St Gallen's abbey district – a UNESCO world heritage site and a magnet for tourists. Photo provided



Artist Stéphanie Baechler originally comes from the canton of Fribourg but lives and works in Amsterdam. She will be one of the speakers at this year's Congress. Photo Ladina Bischof



St Gallen's "open-air lounge" – designed (and coloured in red) by artist Pipilotti Rist and architect Carlos Martinez. Photo: Keystone

most important textile collections, there is a Museum of Art, a Museum of Culture and a Museum of Natural History, a theatre, and a concert hall – all situated in the city's own museum quarter.

* Janina Gehrig is a journalist based in St Gallen

Exporting Swiss culture

Culture will be the main theme of this year's Congress of the Swiss Abroad, which takes place from 18 to 20 August in St Gallen. The event will be an opportunity for Swiss Abroad to engage with federal parliamentarians.

MAYA ROBERT-NICOUD

This 2023 Congress of the Swiss Abroad promises to cover a whole range of pressing issues. Participants will talk politics on the morning of 19 August, focusing specifically on the federal elections in the autumn and the question of e-voting. Representatives of the St Gallen cantonal government and Switzerland's biggest political parties will attend. They will provide an update on progress and developments in policy areas relevant to the "Fifth Switzerland". Guests will include the National Council President, federal parliamentarians, and figures from Swiss cultural life.

Swiss culture and its role beyond our borders will be the hot topic after lunch on the same day. The starting premise is that Swiss culture extends beyond Switzerland and deserves to be nurtured and enhanced both inside and outside our country. International cultural dialogue has a major influ-

ence on shaping our identity, on the way that Switzerland is viewed abroad, on the economy, and on technological progress. The Congress will look at how Swiss cultural exports can help to build bridges with other countries and consolidate Switzerland's international image. It will cover important questions, including whether culture is an export commodity like any other product, and what the costs and benefits are.

The Congress will be a unique opportunity for participants to learn more about these interesting issues, consider the political and cultural challenges of our time, meet experts and key stakeholders, and share valuable ideas and insights.

Register now

Attend this year's Congress for a new, meaningful take on Swiss culture and the cultural role of the "Fifth Switzerland". To view the full schedule and sign up for the event, visit:



swisscommunity.link/kongress2023

Join the conversation

Before the Congress begins, you can discuss e-voting and this year's federal elections by joining the online conversation with other Swiss Abroad:



members.swisscommunity.org

Election manifesto for the “Fifth Switzerland”

At the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) meeting on 17 March 2023, delegates from around the world unanimously approved an election manifesto for the “Fifth Switzerland”, calling for political action in seven key areas during the forthcoming legislative period.

SMILLA SCHÄR

Due to increased international mobility, the number of Swiss Abroad entered on the electoral register of a specific canton and able to participate in the federal elections has been growing for years. However, geographical distance from the relevant authorities and politicians in Switzerland makes it harder for Swiss Abroad to be politically engaged. Through its highest body, the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) acts as an interface defending the interests of the “Fifth Switzerland” in Switzerland. The CSA, referred to as the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”, has submitted an election manifesto to Switzerland’s political parties,



The OSA Executive Board at the CSA meeting in Berne. In the foreground: Lucas Metzger, President Filippo Lombardi, and Ariane Rustichelli. Photo: Alexandra Jäggi

authorities, and election candidates, setting out key demands on behalf of the Swiss Abroad for the 2023–27 legislative period.

Promoting international mobility

In its election manifesto, the CSA calls for a concerted effort to remove unnecessary obstacles to international mobility for Swiss nationals. It wants a clear commitment to developing and driving e-government, which will provide the Swiss Abroad with easy access to government services – regardless of time zone or the geographical distance from Switzerland. Quick and easy access to consular services must also continue for Swiss Abroad in their country of domicile.

To prevent new restrictions on international mobility, the CSA is a strong supporter of continued freedom of movement that allows Swiss citizens to live and work in EU/EFTA countries.

The CSA also advocates removing barriers for Swiss Abroad in relation to social security.

The ongoing issue of e-voting

Voter turnout among the Swiss Abroad plummeted at the last federal elections in 2019, because e-voting was not available. The CSA – as it did before the last legislative period – therefore calls on politicians to introduce

Winter holiday camps for children aged eight to 14

Whether they are skiers or snowboarders, beginners or advanced, young Swiss Abroad between the ages of eight and 14 can have a great time at our winter holiday camp.

Winter holiday camp in Valbella (canton of Grisons),

Date: Wednesday, 27 December 2023 to Friday, 5 January 2024

Number of participants: 42

Cost: CHF 950 (contribution to the camp)

Ski or snowboard hire: approx. CHF 150

Registration

Full details of the winter holiday camp, including the registration form, will be available from Tuesday, 22 August 2023 at sjas.ch/en/winter-camp/.

Registration deadline: 30 September 2023

We offer price reductions whenever these are justified. An application form for financial support is available to download from our website: revue.link/application

DAVID REICHMUTH, FYSA

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

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA)
Alpenstrasse 24, 3006 Berne, Switzerland
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Email: info@sjas.ch / www.sjas.ch/en

e-voting quickly and across the board. When voting papers fail to arrive in time by post, e-voting is the only way for the Swiss Abroad to exercise their right to vote as enshrined in the constitution. An election manifesto on its own is not enough to ensure that Swiss politicians take the concerns of the “Fifth Switzerland” into account. The Swiss Abroad should actually be able to have a say on the future composition of parliament itself and deserve to be adequately represented.

The OSA 2023 election manifesto in full (in German and French): revue.link/manifest



Volunteering for young people

Young Swiss Abroad aged between 15 and 25 should mark 24 June 2023, the date of the 3rd Congress of Young Swiss Abroad, in their diary. Held online and organised in collaboration with the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad (YPSA), the 2023 Congress will revolve around the theme of volunteering and the opportunities that it offers. Join the conversation as young people from all corners of the globe share their views and listen to a range of interesting presentations. Visit our website at revue.link/youthcongress for details of the schedule and for everything else you need to know about the Congress. You can sign up for the event from 15 May 2023.

FABIENNE STOCKER, OSA YOUTH SERVICE



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Discussion

An ancient Egyptian mummy called Shep-en-Isis who was the daughter of a priest lies in the St Gallen Abbey Library. But does she really belong in St Gallen? While she is silent on the matter our readers had a lot to say on this sensitive issue.



Shep-en-Isis and the thorny question of repatriation

JOËLLE TAILLANDIER, SAINT-LOUIS, FRANCE

Shep-en-Isis belongs in her country of origin. This is obvious to anyone who condemns colonialism and the theft of cultural heritage and identity. Like Milo Rau and many others, I hope Switzerland and all countries that have illegally and illegitimately acquired cultural property from elsewhere give the artefacts back. Every country, every people and every civilisation has the inalienable right to protect and showcase its own history, heritage and wealth – including art, culture, natural resources, human expertise, etc.

ERICH BAUMANN, PEMBERTON, CANADA

If it is important to the Egyptians, Shep-en-Isis's mummy should be returned to Egypt – no question. The time is long gone when European countries keeping cultural objects from foreign lands could be acceptable.

ADNANE BEN CHAABANE, TUNIS

Should we return all these cultural artefacts? Or can we just accept that some cultural property will always end up elsewhere around the world? In my opinion, having some artefacts outside their country of origin can act as a cultural conduit. Nor do I think it is a bad thing to be able to view and admire such artefacts without having to travel halfway around the world. Doing so can also make people want to discover more about their own country.

ARYE-ISAAC OPHIR, ISRAEL

Luckily, I have never come across a noisy Egyptian mummy. But wow, do they attract a lot of outside noise.

Getting on the electoral register is simple and straightforward

RUDOLF WEBER, SOMERSET WEST, SOUTH AFRICA

Simple and straightforward? Not without e-voting. And not when voting papers arrive months later or not at all! E-voting needs to be introduced as quickly as possible – for the Swiss Abroad at least. I don't see what the big issue is.

FERNAND VOUTAT, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Where I live, you are lucky to receive anything at all by post. In 15 years, I have not received my voting papers once! E-voting is, therefore, the only way for me to participate in elections and popular votes.

ROBERTO SCHIBLI, SANTA MARTA, COLOMBIA

Here in Colombia, I receive my voting papers months after the actual vote has taken place!

Visit the online edition of "Swiss Review" at www.revue.ch. Read the latest comments on our articles and join the conversation yourself. You can also share your opinions on the community discussion forum of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA).

Link to the SwissCommunity discussion forum: members.swisscommunity.org/forum



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MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

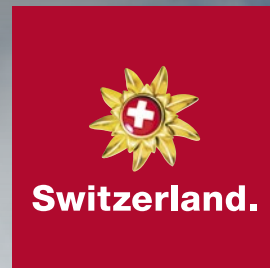
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