

SWISS REVIEW⁺

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad
March 2019



**Comic art – an originally Swiss genre
struggles for recognition**

**Swiss GP shortage – traditional village doctors
are a thing of the past**

**Switzerland's sharpshooters take aim
at tighter gun laws**

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97th Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Montreux



From 16-18 August 2019, the 97th Congress of the Swiss Abroad will take place on the shores of Lake Geneva.

Further information is available on page 23 of this magazine and on our website www.aso-kongress.ch.

**16-18 August 2019:
Save the date!**

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Photo © Maude Rion

Sophia wants to vote

5 Mailbag

6 Focus

GP shortage – family doctors are increasingly rare in Switzerland's rural areas

10 Culture

The birthplace of the traditional comic is in Switzerland

13 Politics

Swiss-EU framework agreement – the moment of truth is at hand

Tighter gun laws – Switzerland's gun enthusiasts are up in arms

News from around the world

17 Literature series

18 Politics / 2019 elections

Pressure on voting rights for Swiss Abroad

20 Society

The Swiss news media in crisis

23 OSA news

A practical guide to getting your name on the electoral register

26 news.admin.ch

28 Images

A new take on the Lucens nuclear accident

30 Books / Sounds

31 Top pick / News



This editorial originated not from the “Swiss Review” office in Berne, but in a Tasmanian suburb about as far away from the Swiss capital as you can get. Many things look different seen from down under. Even the voting rights that Switzerland grants to its expats appear in a new light.

This privilege comes in for constant criticism in Switzerland. Should people who have never lived in the country also be allowed to vote? On our faraway Antipodean island, we have exhibit A: a young Swiss who has never been to Switzerland but still exercises her democratic right. Let's call her Sophia. She wants to vote in her first general election this autumn. Her initial thoughts on the matter are surprising: voting can be a bit of a headache – at first she often finds the issues perplexing. But, and this is the big but, today's Switzerland and the opportunities and challenges it currently faces are what dominate the family conversation once the all-important voting papers arrive. For Sophia, participation in political life therefore means engaging with the real Switzerland of the 21st century – not with an idea of Switzerland based on old reminiscences. By voting, she will become that little bit more Swiss and experience a closer bond with her distant homeland.

What's wrong with that? Young Swiss Abroad like Sophia need to know that the criticism is not necessarily aimed at them, but reflects domestic considerations instead. Foreigners in Switzerland barely have any opportunities to participate in political life, even if they are well integrated – “secondos” who were born in Switzerland being a prime example. A quarter of the permanent resident population in Switzerland pays taxes but is politically disenfranchised. Many believe that this is one of the dilemmas of direct democracy, hence the enfranchised Swiss Abroad are regarded with a certain amount of suspicion. Neuchâtel and Jura have addressed this dilemma by granting cantonal voting rights to foreign citizens. Cantons in French-speaking Switzerland in particular also allow their communes to grant voting rights to foreign nationals at the local level. However, there is no national approach to dealing with the issue.

Talking of elections, do you intend to vote this autumn? This edition of “Swiss Review” tells you all you need to know about getting on the electoral register.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



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The CO₂ vacuum cleaner pioneers from Zurich-Oerlikon



Interesting! All industrial processes generate waste heat, so in industry the filter-regeneration phase comes for free. The problem arises when with best intentions industry tries to dispose of the resulting pure CO₂ gas

(which will have to be compressed for delivery – another energy-consuming process). Makers of carbonated drinks are indeed possible customers, but in their place I would want to be the driver of the project, and this turns around the marketing process logic. The other applications appear to be years in the future.

ERIC WINKLER, GREAT BRITAIN

I also think that we humans should try to be as environmentally friendly as possible. This is why I support all measures to reduce CO₂ levels in the atmosphere. The best proven method is “terrestrial carbon dioxide removal” through reforestation. New forests absorb vast amounts of CO₂. However, it is now clear that there is little interest in this effective and inexpensive alternative, simply because it is not a moneymaker. I am certain that the motives behind all this CO₂-related hysteria are mainly economic. Instead of planting a few trees, businesses like the one in the article prefer to make huge amounts of money developing gigantic and environmentally harmful CO₂ vacuum cleaners.

RETO DERUNGS, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Drought in “Europe’s water reservoir”

My suggestion to solve the problem and many other climate-related issues: fewer cows. Of course, this not only applies to Switzerland but even more to the European Union. Why not give some of our countryside back to Mother Nature?

HANS M. HILBER, LEINFELDEN, GERMANY

Julien Wanders: an African running style



Thank you for your wonderful article on this budding athlete, who is as young as he is promising. Above all, he seems highly motivated in his lifestyle choices, which entail immense sacrifices. We are all rooting for him, hoping he will succeed and reach the top!

PHILIPPE DEROLLAND, FRANCE

The legitimate banknote and the famous counterfeiter



Muy bien hecho Valaisans! This is just the safety net that “small fish” need to protect themselves from the excesses of that monstrosity called globalisation – both today and in the future. In my opinion, David Crettenand and his friends should be awarded the

Nobel Prize for Antiglobalisation.

WALTER LIEBER, COLOMBIA

The forerunner of the Swiss Economic Circle (WIR) originated in the Austrian state of Tyrol, where, based on Silvio Gesell’s Freigeld theory, the municipality of Wörgl issued “stamp scrip” – a local currency designed to be circulated and not hoarded. They used one-, five- and ten-schilling banknotes that lost one per cent of their value each month, hence these banknotes were spent much quicker. One of the secrets of “money” is the speed at which it circulates. Stamp scrip helped to increase the speed of circulation, and this led to widespread prosperity. Many businesses and residents took part in the scheme, not least because they were able to use the new currency to pay their municipal taxes. Valais must therefore be doing something right.

ALFRED SCHMITTER, AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

Vacant churches: rent, sell, demolish?

As a practising Christian, the letter to the editor from Christopher Egli (USA), published in the January edition of Swiss Review really hurt and shocked me. Mr Egli wrote that he was happy to see the number of religious people in Switzerland



declining and wished that this was the case everywhere. I vehemently object to his statement and find it degrading. The reality is different in my experience. For example, life in our parish near Hamburg is built on faith, tolerance and forgiveness. Is Mr Egli advocating that we all become atheists or that we start following some sort of substitute religion? If he is,

then he is forgetting the other side of the coin, the sad fact of the ongoing persecution of Christians in countries like Iran, China, Pakistan and North Korea, where Christians not only end up in prison but sometimes also end up dead.

HANS JÜRGEN SIEGENTHALER, ITZSEDT, GERMANY

Desperately seeking GPs

There is a lack of general practitioners in Switzerland, particularly in rural areas. Initial steps to rectify this situation are proving effective, but the profile of GPs is changing.

SUSANNE WENGER

Many people are still familiar with the concept of the traditional family doctor. For a long time, GPs in Switzerland were as much a part of the fabric of local life as members of the clergy. They were more commonly male than female, and their practices were almost always open. You could contact them at night, at weekends and at Christmas. They would visit you at home and care for your entire family, young and old. Their wives would hold the fort for them, managing the children and the household. Later one of their sons would inherit the practice, where pos-

sible. Yet this is increasingly becoming a thing of the past.

Family doctors who wish to retire due to age now have a hard time finding someone to take over their practice – particularly in rural areas or peripheral regions. Many of them delay their retirement and carry on until they are 70. This situation may get even worse. Some 19,000 doctors work in the outpatient sector, 40 per cent of whom are general practitioners. The average age of GPs in Switzerland is 55. Many are about to retire. Meanwhile, demand for medical care is likely to increase amid an ageing population and

a rise in chronic illnesses (see additional text). A study by the University of Basel warns that Switzerland already has a shortfall of 2,000 GPs. This figure could double in the future.

The backbone of primary care

Family doctors in Switzerland are important because, as general practitioners, they form the backbone of primary care. At 4.3 per thousand inhabitants, Switzerland actually has a high density of doctors compared to other countries (hospital physicians included). However, the spread of doc-

Gabriela Rohrer applies a cast to a patient in her GP practice. There is now a shortage of family doctors like her in Switzerland.

Photo: Danielle Liniger



tors around the country is uneven. The urban canton of Basel-Stadt has 10.1 doctors per thousand inhabitants, while the mountainous canton of Uri only has 1.8. Divergent trends also come into the equation. On the one hand, there is a shortage of GPs. On the other hand, entry restrictions are designed to prevent too many independent doctors from practising. This particularly applies to the more expensive specialists who work in urban areas. Thus, there is a danger of having at the same time a lack of doctors and a surplus of doctors.

One thing that is clear, however, is that healthcare costs in Switzerland are increasing year by year. Switzerland's mandatory health insurance premiums reflect this. Policymakers have difficulty curbing the rise in costs. This is due, not least, to the complicated Swiss healthcare system that involves both state intervention and the free market, and features numerous stakeholders and varied interests – from the federal government, the cantons and municipalities, to doctors, hospitals, health insurers and patients.

Protest outside parliament

Switzerland's GPs lost patience in 2006. When the then health minister Pascal Couchepin (FDP) introduced a plan to reduce laboratory tariffs, it led to unusual scenes in Berne. Thousands of doctors took to the streets for the sake of their profession, demonstrating in front of the Federal Palace. The "Yes to family medicine" popular initiative also helped to exert pressure. In 2014, the electorate voted very clearly in favour of a counter-proposal to this initiative. This granted constitutional status to general practice medicine, meaning that the federal government and the cantons must now ensure adequate provision of high-quality pri-

An ageing population, more chronic illnesses

Switzerland's population is getting older. According to the Federal Statistical Office, the number of inhabitants over 65 is likely to rise from 1.5 million to 2.7 million by 2045. The growing proportion of elderly people, not to mention the modern lifestyle characterised by smoking, an unhealthy diet and too little exercise are leading to an increase in chronic illnesses such as cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and dementia. Many older people suffer from several illnesses at the same time. Chronic illnesses now account for the biggest share of Switzerland's 80-billion-franc annual healthcare bill. (SWE)

mary healthcare and promote the GP profession as a key component in this regard. A master plan initiated by Couchepin's successor Alain Berset (SP) gave GPs a better deal on tariff issues, while education and further training were also improved.

Has this been the right medicine? And why were ever fewer young doctors deciding to become GPs in the first place? We went to Berne's university quarter to find out. Professor Sven Streit works at the university's Institute of Primary Health Care (BIHAM), which was founded in 2009. The fact that primary care is now treated as an academic discipline is part of the solution, he believes. "GPs had an image problem within the medical profession." They were regarded as practi-

An unusual sight in 2006: GPs demonstrating in Berne.

Photo: Keystone



tioners who were far removed from the research environment.

Training the GPs of tomorrow

"This was completely unjustified," he adds, pointing out that GPs have a broad range of knowledge and rely on research findings just as much as specialists who work at central hospitals. Four professors now teach and carry out research at BIHAM on issues such as high blood pressure or the provision of care to elderly people with multiple illnesses. BIHAM also focuses on training the GPs of tomorrow – and its efforts are beginning to pay off. "Some 20 per cent of medical students say that they want to become GPs – twice as many as ten years ago," says Streit.

This is probably because prospective doctors are now sent out during their studies to do work experience at a general practice. As part of their specialist training after graduation, they also have the chance to do an assistantship at a GP surgery, with the cantons subsidising a portion of their salaries. For example, the canton of Berne pays 1.5 million Swiss francs to 35 GP trainees each year. Streit says that 80 per cent of those who do an assistantship go on to become GPs. "These practical insights are important." They lend a fresh image to the profession.

No more going it alone

For Streit, the attraction of working as a GP is the human side of being close to your patients and focusing holistically on their needs. Not only that, but GPs also have different working conditions nowadays. Younger doctors no longer want to be on call seven days a week as their predecessors were, he explains. They prefer more structured working hours. Many like working

part-time for a better work-life balance. The proportion of female doctors is increasing, with more women than men now studying medicine. This is probably one of the reasons why group practices are becoming more popular. Such set-ups allow doctors to share the workload including emergency on-call commitments, as well as infrastructure and administrative tasks. Over half of GP practices in Switzerland are still individual practices, but the number of group practices has tripled in recent years. Streit is unequivocal: “The structural shift will continue.”

Older doctors are also discovering the benefits of being part of a group practice. One them is Philippe Luchsinger, Chairman of the Association of Swiss General Practitioners and Paediatricians (MFE). The GP practice that Luchsinger took over in Affoltern am Albis (canton of Zurich) more than 30 years ago is now a group practice. “We need to get away from the image of a GP as someone who goes it alone,” he says, adding that the GPs of tomorrow are team players who are also seeking to collaborate with paramedical professionals such as nurses, physiotherapists and pharmacists. Although voters decisively rejected a proposal in favour of “managed care” systems in 2012, experts believe that the future lies in coordinated care.

Advanced practice nurse relieves workload

What does coordinated care look like in practice? One example is the Medizentrum group practice in the rural municipality of Schüpfen (canton of Berne), where Christine Wyss works as an advanced practice nurse (APN) together with a team of GPs. Wyss, who graduated with a master’s degree, has an extended range of responsibil-



Philippe Luchsinger speaks for the older generation of family doctors: “We need to get away from the image of a GP as someone who goes it alone.” Photo provided

ities. “My main focus is on older, chronically ill patients who need long-term care,” she says. Wyss makes herself available for consultations. She also administers infusions to patients, takes their pulse and blood pressure, discusses laboratory results with them, and gives them advice. In addition she visits elderly patients who are no longer as mobile as they used to be. Her duties include tasks traditionally carried out by doctors, but the scope of her activity is defined by the GP.

“She is much more qualified than me in other areas,” says Hansulrich Blunier, a GP colleague at the Schüpfen practice with many years’ experience. For example, Wyss is able to teach patients how to cope with their illnesses on a day-to-day basis. This frees Blunier up to deal with more complex cases. Medizentrum offers procedures such as gastrointestinal endoscopies as well as chemotherapy. Blunier thinks that this arrangement enhances his profession. This work is pioneering because APNs in Switzerland still do not have an official job description. There is no official billing tariff either. Uri – a canton with numerous valley communities that have been hit particularly hard by the

shortage of GPs – has now launched a three-year APN pilot project.

Virtual GPs?

Or is the future of GP practices online? Yes, says specialist physician Andrea Vincenzo Braga during a Skype call. Braga is Chief Medical Officer at eedocors, a Berne start-up that was established in 2017. “Digital platforms can play a part in outpatient primary care,” he says. Patients can access eedocors via a smartphone app and get medical advice through a video link. Prescriptions are sent directly to their smartphones. “We fill a gap in the market whenever GPs aren’t available,” says Braga. This can be when they are on holiday, or in areas of the country where relatively few GPs operate. Braga says that his service is also a handy option for professionals with limited time, particularly as people commonly work and live in different places nowadays. More than 20 doctors work for eedocors – from home. Braga believes that primary care must move with the times because many GP consultations do not even require doctor and patient to be in the same room.

According to Professor of Primary Care Sven Streit, Switzerland probably needs a variety of solutions (e.g. new communication channels, new practice models) to reflect its regional diversity. “No two regions are the same,” Streit says. He thinks that the tide has turned in addressing the shortage of GPs. Philippe Luchsinger is also delighted about increased levels of interest among young people. “Primary care is sexy again,” he says. However, he warns that Switzerland cannot afford to rest on its laurels. It will still take years before the medical students who are interested in primary care actually become GPs. Until then, Switzerland will continue to be short of family doctors.

“A wonderful job”

Young doctor Gabriela Rohrer took over an old GP practice in a rural area in the canton of Lucerne. She tells us how she ended up there and what she likes about her job.



Gabriela Rohrer represents the new generation of young GPs.

Photo: Danielle Liniger

INTERVIEW: SUSANNE WENGER

“Swiss Review”: Ms Rohrer, why did a young doctor like you decide to take over a GP practice in a rural area?

Gabriela Rohrer: It was the same question for me, but the other way around. Why work in an urban area? I’m not a city girl. The countryside around Entlebuch is stunning – and I love the outdoors. I couldn’t be happier here. And the life of a country doctor is really interesting.

What is so interesting about it?

GPs in rural areas deal with the full medical A to Z. In urban areas, children go to the paediatrician and women see the gynaecologist. And if you break your wrist, you go to the accident and emergency department. We don’t have any of this. I’m the first port of call for all health issues.

Your predecessor was the village doctor for decades. How did you become his successor?

The village community were determined to keep their GP practice. High investment costs are a common obstacle for young doctors. This is why a cooperative was founded in which the municipality and many local people bought a stake. The cooperative purchased the property in which the GP practice is a tenant. My partner and I own the company that runs the practice. The other two doctors who work at the practice are our employees. It sounds complicated, I know. But the main thing is that it works.

What do you do differently to the traditional family doctor that everyone used to know and love in Switzerland?

I have great respect for what GPs did in the past. My predecessor left his mark on so many families. He accompanied people throughout their lives

– through the good times and the bad. For many, he was just a constant fixture. I also like to build long-term relationships with my patients. Nevertheless, we have changed certain things. We have added a bit more structure to the running of the practice and have tried to be clearer in letting people know about when we are available. It is important for me to have downtime – to know that I can have an afternoon off or an uninterrupted night’s sleep, for example.

You are Chairwoman of the Swiss Young General Practitioners Association. Why is the GP profession starting to appeal to young people again?

It has always been an attractive profession. Family medicine is wonderful. There are other reasons why young people turned their backs on it for a while. We failed to develop the next generation. There was barely any liaison between universities and GP practices. Policymakers made life difficult for GPs. Quite a bit has changed since then. Primary care has taken on a whole new meaning at the political level, and a great deal has improved in the area of training. GPs themselves also realised that they had to work hard to revamp their image. Our enthusiasm has rubbed off on young people. We need a concerted effort to reap the benefits. All the red tape in our job can be scary. You would not believe how many forms I have to fill in! I would rather devote the time to patients.

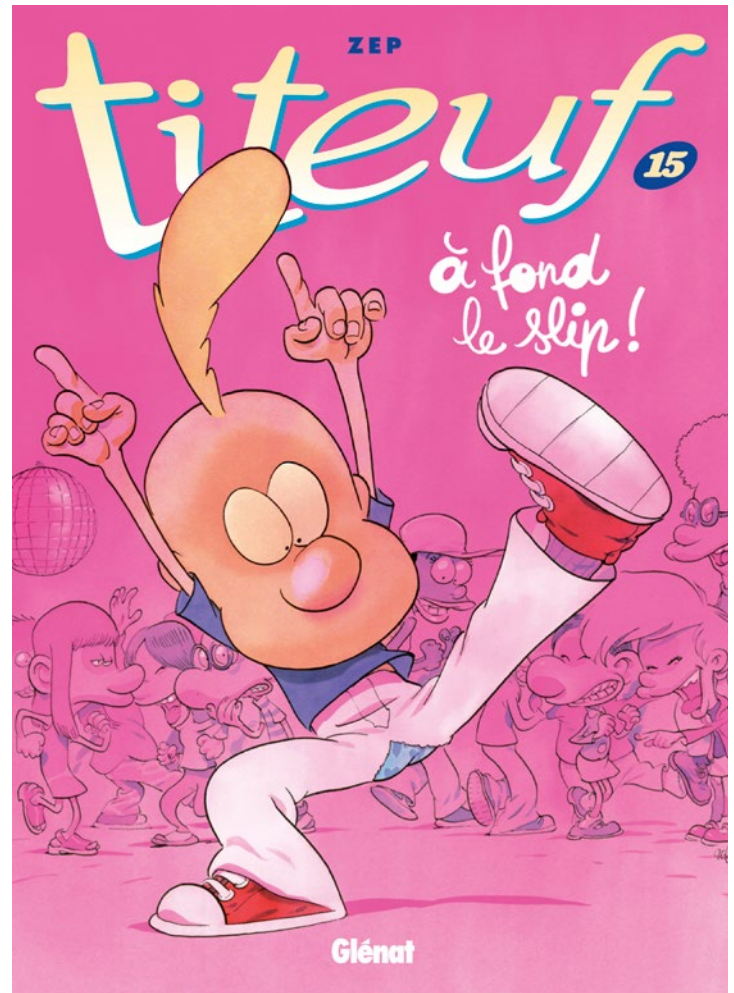
Gabriela Rohrer, Specialist in General Internal Medicine FMH, has headed the GP practice in Flüfli (municipality of Flüfli/Sörenberg in the canton of Lucerne) since the beginning of 2018. She is 35 years old and comes from the Berne region.



"Monsieur Jabot", the first work by Rodolphe Töpffer published in 1833.



Scene from "Femme sauvage" by Tom Tirabosco. The work will be published by Futuropolis in 2019.



Title page of the 15th volume of the series "Titeuf" by Zep, published in 2017.

Comic art: Swiss-born, but snubbed by the state

Switzerland boasts an exceptionally vibrant and diverse range of graphic novels. However, this storytelling art, created by Genevan Rodolphe Töpffer in the 19th century, is yet to be granted official recognition.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

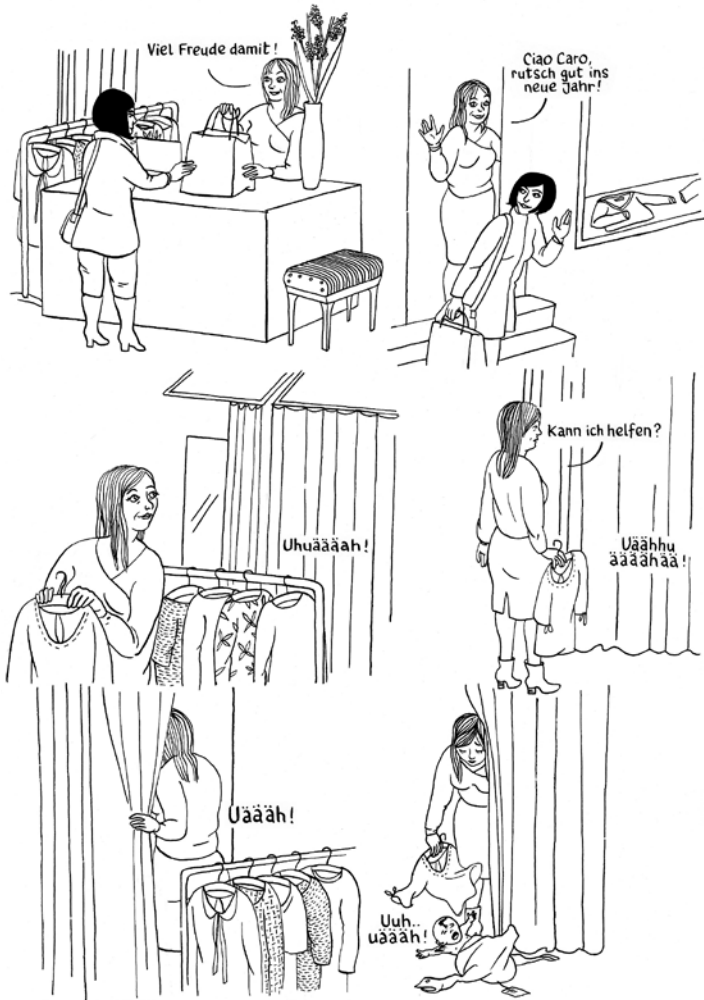
In November 2018, a small group representing graphic novels in Switzerland met with the Director of the Federal Office of Culture (FOC). The aim of the visit was to convince the federal authorities to acknowledge comic art (or "the ninth art" as it is known in French) as a distinct discipline, with the creation of a Swiss prize for graphic novels and a national grant. It was hoped this development would feature in the 2019 Culture Dispatch published every four years by the FOC. Unfortunately, the team sent by Swit-

zerland's comic network came away empty handed: "The Culture Dispatch will mention graphic novels, but that's all. We're disappointed because we had hoped to see a real sign of recognition for this art form," admits Jana Jakoubek, artistic director of the Fumetto festival in Lucerne. "I just hope that when graphic novels finally begin receiving funding like theatre productions, there will still be some left to see it," quips Zep, ironically. The creator of "Titeuf" has sold almost 20 million albums around the world. He struggles to understand the Swiss authori-

ties' reticence, particularly given that "comic book museums from Korea to the USA name Rodolphe Töpffer from Geneva as the very creator of the genre".

Switzerland opens first comic art school

Co-founder of the first Ecole supérieure de bandes dessinées (higher institute for graphic novels) in Switzerland, launched in Geneva in 2017, artist Tom Tirabosco is fighting for the creation of a Swiss centre for graphic



Excerpt from "Das Unbekannte" by Anna Sommer, published in 2018 by Edition Moderne.



Alex Baladi's "Robinson suisse" will soon be published by Atrabile. The artist drew inspiration from a book by Isabelle de Montolieu and a novel by Johann David Wyss.

novels. He defines the genre as "a major art form that has come of age". "Comic artists now tackle all kinds of themes and are often far removed from the traditional French-Belgian publications, like Spirou or Lucky Luke," he insists. "It is the only artistic medium ever to have been invented in Switzerland," adds Dominique Radrizzani, director of the Lausanne festival, BDFIL. The discipline has been honoured in Geneva, where an Ibis Styles hotel is dedicated to Töpffer and his local successors (see box on next page).

Authors from the different parts of Switzerland now export their work internationally. Most come from French-speaking Switzerland, notably Derib, Cosey, Buche, Bertschy, Ti-



"The comic has come of age," says Tom Tirabosco, co-founder of the first Swiss school of comic art and illustration founded in Geneva in 2017.

Photo: Jérémy Lavave (DR)

rabosco, Peeters and Wazem. The German-speaking population also boasts its share of major authors, such as Thomas Ott and Anna Sommer, who follow in the footsteps of the German artist Wilhelm Busch, the man behind "Max and Moritz". So, what then of the reticence mentioned by Zep? "Graphic novels are often considered as entertainment art, or an industry," explains Philippe Duvanel, who runs the Delémont'BD festival. Duvanel participated in a previous visit to Bern four years ago, accompanied by colleagues from the Jura region, in support of a Swiss prize for graphic novels. According to Duvanel, Federal Councillor Alain Berset who oversees the FOC is in fact somewhat receptive to comic art. Nevertheless, "there is an undeni-

able problem regarding the legitimacy of attributing public funding to graphic novels. This is not the case for other art forms, like theatre, for example," he laments.

Comic art requires few resources but considerable time

Although the materials needed for drawing might seem simple enough, "creating comic art is extremely time consuming", explains Zep. In a world where a rising quantity of work is countered by increasingly limited printing opportunities, for this illustrator the profession of comic artist is becoming uncertain. He is in favour of a system that would provide support for comic creation, like that of the



Comics emerged from the alternative scene

Born in 1799, Genevese satirist Rodolphe Töpffer is considered the founder of comic art, or “the ninth art” as it is known in French. “Töpffer wrote short stories in which he inserted drawings to support his text. He set out all of the elements of the contemporary comic,” explains Dominique Berlie, the councillor responsible for culture for the City of Geneva. Layout, panels, effects of repetition, arc of suspense: through these inventions, the self-taught creator of “graphic literature” met international success with his “Histoire de Monsieur Jabot” (see page 10), amongst other titles. “He also presented a theory to back up his art and received support from Goethe, who saw something important in it,” recalls Dominique Berlie. Jana Jakoubek continues: “After Töpffer, everything went quiet in Switzerland for a long time.”

“In the 1960s and 1970s came a comic that was to sell at an international level. It was an alternative piece linked to the world of squats, published in left-wing posters and newspapers,” says Dominique Berlie. In the 1970s, Genevan artists Ceppi and Poussin travelled to Paris where they worked with several large-scale publishing houses. Then, at the beginning of the 1990s, the Genevan magazine “Sauve qui peut” published the work of artists from the world of applied art, paving the way for voices of the new generation: Zep, Wazem, Baladi, Helge Reumann, Peeters and Tirabosco, amongst others.

In his youth, Zep offered his work to the local daily newspapers, but was unenthusiastically received. Yet the future creator of the “Guide du zizi sexuel” was soon relieved to see the work of his contemporaries emerging in the media. “The success of people like Derib, the author of *Yakari*, made me believe that I could break through in this profession,” he explains. Zep also talks of his meeting with Cosey, the creator of “In Search of Peter Pan”. “I love the mountains and I recognised a part of myself in the contemplative narratives set in the Pennine Alps. It showed we could tell our own Swiss stories at a time where Parisian comics were far removed from such themes.”

The next generation of Swiss comic artists is making itself heard, Dominique Berlie assures us, citing notably authors like Peggy Adam, Isabelle Pralong and Guillaume Long. In German-speaking Switzerland, Tom Tirabosco mentions the Schwyz-born painter Andreas Gefe, while Jana Jakoubek highlights work by the young Noemi Laake and Andreas Kiener from Lucerne, both active members of the “Ampel” group and magazine. (SH)

French National Book Center (CNL) in which grants are allocated by juries of experts. In Switzerland, the only such resources are a small number of cantonal grants; federal support for graphic novels is not bestowed by teams of experts, with comic art being classed simply as another form of design.

But in spite of everything, the Swiss comic scene may well be on its way to achieving recognition from the public authorities, particularly in French-speaking areas where cities like Lausanne and Geneva are working on plans for a centre of the “ninth art”. “Swiss comic art is earning Geneva a solid place amongst the genre’s major hubs, alongside Paris, Brussels and Angoulême,” insists Tom Tirabosco, who chairs the Swiss Comics Artists Association. Since 1997, Geneva has rewarded works of exceptional quality with the Rodolphe Töpffer awards. Switzerland also houses the Cartoonmuseum in Basel and hosts three major festivals: BD-FIL, Fumetto and Delémont’BD. Additional events are celebrated in Aigle (VD), Belfaux (FR), Tramelan (BE) and Lugano (TI).

Publishers working with Europe

The Swiss publishing scene is active too, with publishing houses like Atrabile focusing on “underground” graphic novels and Paquet publishing work throughout Europe. RVB, a group led by Genevan artist Yannis La Macchia, also publishes work in digital format. In German-speaking Switzerland, Swiss comics are present in magazines such as “Ampel”, published by a collective in Lucerne, and “Strapazin” based in Zurich. “Moderne” also published the latest piece by Anna Sommer (see image opposite), whose work has been translated into French. When asked

5 cult Swiss graphic novels



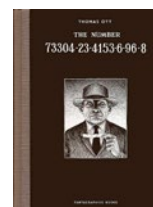
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if there is a “Swiss” comic style, Zep replies: “Perhaps in the approach to the profession, which has developed in simultaneously multicultural and isolated surroundings.”

The moment of truth is at hand

Switzerland must act fast to clarify the nature of its relationship with the European Union. However, the Federal Council wants to consult with the main domestic actors before adopting a position on the framework agreement awaiting signature. They have some major reservations.

THEODORA PETER

After five years, the negotiations on an institutional framework agreement to regulate future bilateral relations between Switzerland and the European Union (EU) were finally concluded in December 2018. A draft agreement has been awaiting signature ever since. However, to the amazement of Brussels, a response of any kind has yet to materialise. The Federal Council has simply “taken note” of the long anticipated outcome of these negotiations as it wants to consult the main actors at home to gauge the mood before adopting a position on the pros and cons of the agreement in the spring. Federal Councillors have been busy holding discussions with the cantons, political parties, social partners, the business community and academia.

One thing is clear: the stakes are high. One in every three francs generated by Switzerland stems from the country’s ties to the EU. The bilateral agreements facilitate trade worth 1 billion francs every day. The Swiss economy requires free access to the EU market. The institutional framework agreement is designed to secure the extension of the five current bilateral agreements (free movement of persons, land transport, air traffic, mutual recognition of industrial standards and agricultural products) and facilitate new ones (electricity market).

This consultation process shows that there are at least three obstacles to furthering bilateral relations.

1. Wage protection

Switzerland would have to adopt almost all the EU rules on wage protection, which would weaken its flanking measures against wage dumping. Foreign companies are currently obliged to give eight days’ notice if they wish to operate in Switzerland. This protectionist practice is a thorn in the EU’s side, which is why it wants to reduce the period to four working days. However, this concession crosses a red line in the eyes of the Swiss unions and Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP). They are not prepared to compromise on the eight-day rule. They see it as the only way to maintain effective protection against wage dumping.



The framework agreement would help foreign firms to operate in Switzerland – on local construction sites, for example. This has caused concern among the unions who fear it will jeopardise wage levels. Photo: Keystone

2. The dynamic adoption of laws

The framework agreement would commit Switzerland to take a “dynamic adoption approach” to passing laws. That means when the EU passes new laws, Switzerland would have two years in which to adopt those laws. However, the direct democratic processes would remain intact as Switzerland would be granted a third year for implementation in the event of a referendum. If Switzerland does not want to adopt a new EU law, Brussels can appeal to an independent arbitration panel. This mechanism has proven to be very controversial. The Swiss People’s Party (SVP) considers it a threat to Swiss sovereignty and has warned against “foreign judges”. At a public hearing of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council, Carl Baudenbacher, former EFTA court president, even labelled the arbitration panel a “fig leaf”. There is a danger of unilateral dependence on the European Union Court of Justice as its interpretation of EU law would be binding on the arbitration panel. Other commentators, such as European law expert Astrid Epiney, see the legal dynamic adoption process as a more workable prospect, as it would actually enable legal certainty. Switzerland would also have consultation rights and could even appeal to the arbitration panel itself if necessary.

Swiss citizens in the UK remain secure post Brexit

Swiss citizens in the UK and British citizens in Switzerland will continue to enjoy the same rights post Brexit, as established in a bilateral agreement between the two countries. They will retain residence rights plus entitlement to social insurance and recognition of professional qualifications. These rights are lifelong. However, they do not extend to British and Swiss citizens who move when the free movement of persons is no longer in force.

In the event of a no-deal Brexit, the agreement between Switzerland and the UK is set to come into force on 30 March. In the event of an orderly Brexit, there will most likely be a transition phase until the end of 2020, during which time the current provisions of the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons will apply. At the end of 2017, there were about 34,500 Swiss citizens in the UK and 43,000 British citizens in Switzerland.

The two countries have also concluded an agreement on air traffic to secure current traffic rights and a seamless continuation of the status quo. There are approximately 150 flights between Switzerland and the UK every day. (TP)

Brexit agreement: ogy.de/schweiz-brexit

3. The Citizens’ Rights Directive

The Citizens’ Rights Directive does not actually feature in the draft framework agreement. However, it was not explicitly excluded either, as Switzerland had wanted during the negotiations. The matter of adopting this directive could even be the first case to land before the arbitration panel. The Citizens’ Rights Directive has ensured reciprocal civil rights for EU member states since 2004. These rights extend beyond the free movement of persons, which exists between Switzerland and the EU, to include entitlement to social assistance, the right to an extended stay and protection from deportation. The Liberals (FDP) and Christian Democrat People’s Party (CVP) see this as a stumbling block and demand the explicit exclusion of the directive from the framework agreement.

None of the parties represented in the Federal Council have given their unconditional support to the agreement as it currently stands. The economic umbrella organisation *economiesuisse* also has reservations. The advantages of market access to the Swiss economy are beyond dispute. However, *economiesuisse* wants “clarification” on the specific application of the agreement, for example regarding the Citizens’ Rights Directive and social partnership. The system of joint monitoring also needs to be fully upheld.

economiesuisse does not want further negotiations, which the EU has excluded anyway; however, Brussels may not prove to be as intransigent as it seems in that respect. Political commentators believe that the Federal Council’s strategy could be to draw out the process through internal consultation and ultimately gain concessions. The EU has always proven to be flexible in delicate situations and granted exceptions to individual states – so why would a well disposed non-member state not expect the same?

The article is valid as at the editorial deadline of mid-February 2019.

A brief overview of the framework agreement: ogy.de/eu-deal



Gun lobby takes aim

Switzerland must adapt its gun laws to EU requirements if it wants to safeguard Schengen. The EU Firearms Directive is under attack from gun rights campaigners – and will be put to a referendum on 19 May.

JÜRIG MÜLLER

Weapons in Switzerland are a serious business. Just ask William Tell. The country's original sharp-shooter recently came back to the rescue – this time holding up his right hand like a traffic policeman on the website of gun lobby group Pro Tell and imploring “liberal Switzerland” to reject the EU's “disarmament diktat”. Tell's modern-day advocate is René Schneider who, as honorary chairman of the Unterseen military rifle club, honorary member of the Bernese Oberland shooting association, and honorary member of the sports shooting association of the canton of Berne, is a man with intimate knowledge of the Swiss shooting scene. “As a democratic country, it is up to us to decide what we want and what we don't want,” Schneider tells “Swiss Review”. “We simply cannot let the EU Firearms Directive ruin the great Swiss tradition of sports shooting.” Switzerland's firearm enthusiasts have come out all guns blazing.

This is a debate born of the Paris terrorist attacks of 2015, when semi-automatic weapons were used to kill 130 peo-

ple. The EU tightened its gun laws soon thereafter. Given that it belongs to the Schengen Area and – by extension – to the European police security system, Switzerland must amend its national gun laws in line with these new regulations. The country's shooting associations, supported by

the Swiss People's Party (SVP), oppose this and have called a referendum on the matter.

Spotlight on semi-automatic firearms

Semi-automatic weapons with high magazine capacity are banned under EU law. These include rifles, revolvers and pistols that will release a bullet each time the trigger is pulled – and, in the process, can fire multiple consecutive shots without the need to reload. Unfortunately, it just so happens that the SIG 550 and SIG 510 assault rifles also belong to this category. Both are very popular among Swiss gun enthusiasts. After talks with the EU, Switzerland has however obtained an exemption that upholds the tradition of standard-issue weapons being taken home and used at the end of military service. This is very accommodating from the EU, given that the concession applies exclusively to Switzerland – hence the exemption is sometimes referred to as “Lex Helvetica”.

Anyone who already owns such a firearm as a result of a previous purchase has nothing to worry about. However, their weapon must be entered in a cantonal firearms register. If it is not, the owner has three years to rectify this. Sports shooters can also still buy this type of rifle, although they need to be a member of a rifle club or prove that they use their weapon for sporting purposes on a regular basis. The government deems five shoots within five years to be “regular”.

But why exactly does the gun lobby object to these provisions? Schneider: “We would no longer be firearm owners but holders of illegal guns who are tolerated by the state and subject to special requirements. We would be using ‘banned weapons’ to practise our sport. Buying a firearm would only be possible via an exemption. This is much more restrictive than the current firearm acquisition permit and would result in a massive decline in the number of shooting enthusiasts.” Schneider also believes that it is “totally illogical” for a standard-issue army firearm not to be considered as prohibited whereas a privately acquired firearm would be. “After all, we're talking about exactly the same gun. It would create a two-tier system among gun owners.”

Could the new regulations perhaps lead to an increase in membership among rifle clubs instead, assuming that

Switzerland's shooting clubs view tighter gun laws as an existential threat.

Photo: Keystone



ple. The EU tightened its gun laws soon thereafter. Given that it belongs to the Schengen Area and – by extension – to the European police security system, Switzerland must amend its national gun laws in line with these new regulations. The country's shooting associations, supported by

sports shooters would also have to be members of such clubs? Schneider is adamant: “No chance. In our club we only take on new members who have been introduced by members who are already registered with us. This means that we only accept members of good repute. We don’t just take on every person who wants to join us. I’m pretty sure that obligations and responsibilities would be passed on to clubs. And I can imagine that clubs would suddenly be responsible for providing the relevant certification for their members.”

No Schengen will cost billions

Switzerland’s gun clubs therefore have considerable misgivings – despite Parliament’s best efforts to keep red tape to a minimum. Josef Dittli, FDP member of the Council of States for the canton of Uri, nailed it when he said, “We want to take into account the particular nature and tradition of shooting in this country, while taking care not to jeopardise the Schengen Agreements.” All left-wing motions in favour of a further tightening of Switzerland’s gun laws have been rejected, as have those of the SVP designed to scupper implementation of EU requirements.

CVP National Councillor Nicolo Paganini warns against sacrificing Schengen “on the altar of sovereignty but for all the wrong reasons”. The Federal Office of Police (fedpol) also provided a reality check on the problems that could arise, noting that Switzerland’s police would be “deaf and blind” without Schengen, and that it was important for the country to remain part of the European security system. Developing a police strategy on a purely national security level, based on current Schengen rules, would cost between 400 and 500 million Swiss francs. Losing visa-free access to Schengen would also have serious consequences for the Swiss tourism industry and for cross-border regions. The federal government calculates that the Swiss economy would lose up to 11 billion Swiss francs each year without Schengen.

Is this not too high a price to pay for sparing Switzerland’s gun lobby a few bureaucratic hoops? Schneider dodges the question slightly. In his view, the Federal Council should simply go back to Brussels and renegotiate the EU Firearms Directive. “I believe it is possible to find a solution that is acceptable to both sides and does not jeopardise Schengen.”



Authority on Swiss guns, René Schneider.
Photo provided

Switzerland’s arsenal of weapons

Switzerland has a great shooting tradition and numerous gun enthusiasts. There were around two million firearms kept in Swiss households according to the most recent federal government estimate in 2013. “NZZ am Sonntag” research shows that the cantons have issued between 150,000 and 250,000 firearm acquisition permits since then. Given that each acquisition permit enables the purchase of up to three firearms, the estimated total number of firearms in Swiss households is now between 2.5 and 3 million.

On 19 May 2019, there will also be a referendum on the Federal Act on Tax Reform and AHV Financing (TRAF). The November 2018 issue of “Swiss Review” covered the proposal in detail.

Urban sprawl initiative fails



The Young Greens’ Urban Sprawl Initiative aimed to put a freeze on the total area of building-zone land in Switzerland, while only allowing the creation of new building zones if building land elsewhere of at least equivalent size was downgraded to offset these new zones. Initially, the initiative was popular in the opinion polls, but it was a very different story on voting day. The proposal was decisively rejected by 63.7 per cent of the electorate on 10 February 2019. This was mainly because voters believed the initiative was too radical and rigid. Its opponents pointed out that the Spatial Planning Act (SPA), revised in 2013, was adequate, effective and beginning to come into its own, with the cantons working to implement its stricter regime. Any constitutional amendment would therefore have been counterproductive. Furthermore, the revised SPA not only prevents building zones from expanding, it also allows these zones to be withdrawn. (JM)

Japanese tea girls and Norwegian farmers

The one-time “Der Bund” editor Karl Friedrich Kurz was a storyteller and fascinating chronicler of foreign worlds and cultures.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

Kohana, a type of “Madame Butterfly”, is just as seductive as she is strange to the young man who lived with her for a period of time in Yokohama during 1906–07. And similar to Yoko and the Swiss Buser in Adolf Muschg’s “Sommer des Hasen” 60 years later, the tea girl with her shy devotion introduces a European to Japanese mentality, customs and traditions in a way that no tourist experience could ever do. Kohana is a character from the book “Vom Nil zum Fujiyama”, published in 1910 by Huber in Frauenfeld. The author is Karl Friedrich Kurz, born in 1878 and raised in Basel. The son of a German shoe-polish manufacturer, he established himself as an author just like his brother Hermann (1880–1933) after attending the Karlsruhe Kunstakademie and gathered material from his travels and sojourns around the world.

Japan was also the setting for “Doktor Siegels Ostasienfahrt” (1911) and “Sayonara” (1937). From 1916 to 1922, Kurz was the editor of the “Der Bund” newspaper in Bern, which is why three of his 29 books ended up being set in Switzerland: “Die Krummbacher und der Katzengusti” (1913), “Zwischen Aare und Rhone” (1920) and “Der Mooshof” (1922). By 1914, two of his books – “Der Held von Björnäs” and “Mitternachtssonne und Nordlicht” had been set in Norway. Just like his contemporaries Hermann Hiltbrunner and Hugo Marti, Kurz was one of those Swiss authors who was always inspired anew by Norway, its fjords and forests. He was a permanent resident there from 1924 until his death in 1962.

Love, money and betrayal

The novel “Die goldene Woge”, published in 1927, portrays how the spoils of war brought unpleasantness to this neutral country after 1914, and Kurz allows city-dweller Oline to drive the fishing village of Mjelvik and its young men to distraction in the very entertaining “Das Königreich Mjelvik”, published in 1930. “Tyra, die Märcheninsel” is a lively novel of farmers and fishers featuring many original characters and won the Wilhelm Raabe prize in 1934, while “Herrn Erlings Magd” (1936) describes the secret affair between a farmer and his maid, who gives him a son and heir in the end.

The indisputable hero of this Nordland-Swiss author, who also consistently illustrated his books himself, was

Knut Hamsun – except for the fact that all the expansiveness of the landscapes, psychological subtlety of his characters and humour are lacking that certain abysmal, pessimistic flair that the Norwegian evoked in “Hunger”, for example. Even though the collapse of civilisation or the arrival of speculation and profit-seeking threatens the peace of the isolated villages and farms, order is restored in the end and the optimism of the author prevails, for whom, as it says in the “Die goldene Woge”, there is “something that is in humans, which floods cannot destroy, and that the swamp with its fever cannot destroy: the great and eternal, which sets them as masters over all things”. No character conveys this better than the silent little farmhand Monrad in “Tyra, die Märcheninsel”, when he suddenly starts to sing and hum, and one day builds himself a violin and begins to fill the loneliness in his heart with music. Karl Friedrich Kurz’s books can only be found at antique bookdealers today, even though he introduced his fellow Swiss not just to Japan but also to his adopted home of Norway in an exciting and still very readable manner.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: K. F. Kurz: “Die Fischer am Fjord”. Schweizer Druck- und Verlagshaus, Zurich 1941. Available as e-book.



“Through books I learned perhaps somewhat more quickly to understand that there is more to life than just work and money,” commented Johannes. “We lead lives like carriage horses, whipped forward day in and day out. Pulling, always pulling; pulling with all our strength, dulled, plodding, restless... I am not afraid of work, but too much work turns people into beasts of burden!”

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Questions are being asked about voting rights for Swiss living abroad

Anyone who has a Swiss passport and lives abroad may vote and participate in elections – even standing for a seat in parliament. However, in Switzerland itself there are critical voices being raised against the expanded political rights of the “Fifth Switzerland”.

JÜRIG MÜLLER

Swiss living abroad had to wait exactly 167 years from the founding of the federal state in 1848 until one of their own was first elected to the National Council. It finally happened in 2015. The prominent ex-diplomat Tim Guldimann (SP), resident in Berlin, entered parliament as the first “true” Swiss Abroad. There is a reason for the weak representation of the “Fifth Switzerland” in parliament. In contrast to Guldimann, the majority of the candidates are relatively unknown both at home and abroad. Despite this obstacle, interest in an elected role is growing. Only three Swiss citizens living abroad stood for election in 1995. In 2015, the number had grown to 56. Interest in elections and voting in the homeland is also increasing slightly. In 2018, the number of registered voters abroad rose from 172,000 to 174,000 out of a total number of 752,000 Swiss expatriates.



Tim Guldimann, the first “true” Swiss Abroad in the National Council, comments on his dilemma: “A tram in Zurich is not the same as the U-Bahn in Berlin.” Photo: Keystone

National Council regardless of where they live, even if it means they must make the trip from South America. The journey to the Swiss border is charged to the government; all members of parliament are given a Swiss GA travelcard for travel within Switzerland.

There is still another problem, however, for those who want to fulfil a Swiss parliamentary role from abroad. It is not easy to live in one country and engage in politics in another. Tim Guldimann summed up the dilemma nicely: “A tram in Zurich is not the same as the U-Bahn in Ber-



lin.” He said that as a Swiss Abroad, he only managed to be present in his Zurich constituency for limited periods. As a result, he stood down just two years after his election in 2015.

Permanent seats for Swiss living abroad?

Nevertheless, efforts are continually being made to ensure the presence of the “Fifth Switzerland” in parliament on an institutional level. Around ten

years ago two members of parliament made an unsuccessful proposal to create guaranteed seats for Swiss expatriates in the National Council and the Council of States. This approach is not common across Europe; only France, Italy, Croatia, Portugal and Romania have permanent seats in parliament reserved for the diaspora.

The issue of whether Switzerland should reserve a guaranteed number of seats in parliament for its citizens living abroad will arise again eventually. According to Ariane Rustichelli, director of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), a working group from the Council of the Swiss Abroad is currently investigating how to go about that. During the course of 2019, a final report with corresponding recommendations should be available.

Politicians want to restrict voting rights of Swiss Abroad

In Swiss politics, however, there are also sporadic efforts being made to restrict rather than extend the right to vote and stand for election for Swiss citizens living abroad. In an interview with swissinfo, FDP member of the Council of States Andrea Caroni said that he finds it: “strange that people who have never lived in Switzerland and are not planning on returning have the right to vote and stand for election here while completely integrated foreigners in Switzerland are not given the right to vote on issues that affect them directly”. SVP National Council member Peter Keller,

Problems after the election

Once an expatriate is duly elected to the National Council, certain problems need to be overcome. These begin with Article 10 of the Parliament Act: “Assembly members are obliged to attend the meetings of the councils and committees”. That means live and in person. No one is allowed to participate in a parliamentary debate or committee meeting via Skype, not even if they live in Australia. Travel costs begin to pile up – and the government is left footing the bill. Travel to Bern is paid for every member of the



Andrea Caroni, FDP member of the Council of States (AR), criticises the fact that people who have never lived in Switzerland can vote and stand for election while completely integrated foreigners in Switzerland have hardly any voting rights.

Photo: Keystone



Peter Keller, SVP National Councillor (NW), argues that Swiss citizens with dual citizenship "should only have one vote" regardless of whether they live in Switzerland or abroad.

Photo: Keystone

on the other hand, is critical of the privileges of dual citizens and feels they should decide where and how they will exercise their right to vote. "This applies to Swiss with dual citizenship who have residence here but also to Swiss expatriates with two passports. They should also only have one right to vote," argued Keller during an interpellation last year.

The question of dual citizenship is also being considered by the Federal Commission on Migration (FCM), which pointed out in a study from December 2018 that almost exactly three-quarters of Swiss citizens living abroad also possess a second citizenship. "From a democratic-political perspective, it appears particularly problematic that recognition of dual citizenship leads to growing numbers of people who are formally citizens of a country yet have no other or hardly any other relation-

ship to that country apart from citizenship. This problem is especially prevalent in Switzerland because Swiss expatriates usually always maintain full voting rights. It would therefore be appropriate to discuss how long Swiss citizenship can be conferred on following generations of Swiss Abroad."

As one of the study authors emphasised when talking to various media outlets, this should not mean that Swiss expatriates would have their citizenship revoked. However, the feeling is that a discussion should be held regarding the right to vote and stand for election. Voting rights are appropriate for first-generation Swiss living abroad. By the third generation at the latest, however, there "is hardly any solid argument for ensuring the right to vote and stand for election". In extreme cases, this population group could even decide a referendum in

Ariane Rustichelli, ASO director, counters that any restriction on political rights would lead "to the creation of different classes of citizens". Photo: ASO



Switzerland without ever having lived in the country.

Director of OSA defends rights

OSA director Ariane Rustichelli vehemently rejects any restriction of political rights. In her opinion, time limits would strip a segment of the Swiss population of their rights. "In effect, this would be equal to creating differ-

ent classes of citizens." Furthermore, a large number of ballot proposals are also relevant for Swiss expatriates, regardless of the length of their stay abroad, e.g. occupational benefit issues, international conventions, and relationships with the EU. Finally, she comments that the majority of the 752,000 Swiss Abroad live in a European country – more than 482,000 of them – and many return to Switzerland regularly. In addition, the outside perspective of the Swiss living abroad is an asset for Switzerland, comments Rustichelli.

Switzerland is not alone in its stance on voting rights. On the contrary, a report on this topic by the Federal Council in 2016 indicated that the majority of European states "do not have specific criteria for safeguarding political rights for citizens living abroad". In other words, the same criteria apply as for voters at home. However, Germany, Sweden and the UK make their expatriates' right to vote conditional on additional criteria. In Sweden, expatriates are given voting rights only if they had a residence in their native country at some point. In the UK, citizens living abroad must have been registered as a voter in their home constituency in the UK within the past 15 years. As for Germany, it requires expatriates to complete a minimum three-month stay in Germany after they reach 14 years of age, and within the past 25 years.

Journalism is facing the squeeze

Like their counterparts abroad, the media in Switzerland are stuck in a financial crisis. This is affecting the diversity of content – and fuelling calls for government funding.

THEODORA PETER

“There is a severe lack of money in the journalism sector,” says Manuel Puppis, Professor in Media Systems at the University of Fribourg. He illustrates this alarming observation with some stark figures. Only 20 years ago, 1.7 billion Swiss francs in revenue from advertisements and job postings flowed into the coffers of newspaper publishing companies on an annual basis. Printing machines ran at full capacity. The onset of the digital age saw advertising move increasingly over to the Internet. According to Puppis, paid-for newspapers in Switzerland only generated around 500 million Swiss francs from advertising in 2018. Publishers could only offset a small amount of this shortfall through advertisements on their online platforms. On the other hand, Internet giants such as Google and Facebook are making big money. As much as 1.4 billion Swiss francs of the total 2.1 billion Swiss francs earned from online advertising in Switzerland in 2017 went to search engines. Display advertising on websites and apps accounted for only 265 million Swiss francs – with only a fraction of this amount going towards the journalism sector.

One editorial team, several publications

In recent years, Swiss media companies have responded to the dramatic slump in advertising revenue by concentrating and merging their editorial teams, or even closing institutions such as most recently “Le Matin” in French-speaking Switzerland (see secondary text). This has not only cost hundreds of jobs but also been detrimental to journalistic diversity.

It is of course cheaper for publishing houses to produce all cross-regional content in one place, explains Puppis. “However, if only a small number of market players are producing copy for a national audience, this limits media plurality.” For example, Zurich-based Tamedia has a central editorial department that currently provides 13 daily newspapers within the Zurich-Basel-Berne triangle with all the national, foreign, business, culture and sports news that these outlets need.

Meanwhile, CH Media – a joint venture between AZ Medien and NZZ-Regionalzeitungen – will soon be supplying 19 daily newspapers, including the “Luzerner Zeitung” and “St. Galler Tagblatt”, with national news coverage from its

Aarau-based central editorial office. “Blick” (Ringier), “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” and the online platform of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR) remain the country’s independent media voices.

Losing regional perspective

Switzerland still has a large number of newspapers due to the regional split editions. However, this obscures the fact that “a regional take on national events barely exists any more”, says Puppis, who believes that it is still important to “cover all geographical localities” in a federal Switzerland that practises direct democracy at national, cantonal and municipal level. Local providers have stepped into the breach in some regions. For example, online magazine “Zentralplus” produces news for the cantons of Lucerne and Zug.

“Republik” – a new ad-free, reader-funded online magazine – was launched at national level in 2018. More than 13,000 people pledged their support for the platform in record time by registering as subscribers, or “co-publishers”, even before the magazine had published its first story. The next few years will prove whether “Republik” has a viable business model. In the long run, “Republik” needs 28,000 subscribers (publishers) to balance its books. Puppis points out that both the German-language “Republik”

More “likes”, less news

The last ten years have seen a major decline in interest among young people for conventional news. According to a survey by the Research Institute for the Public Sphere and Society (Fög) at the University of Zurich, 53 per cent of 16- to 29-year-olds in Switzerland are “news-deprived” young people who mostly consume entertainment and only follow the news sporadically. This figure compares to 32 per cent in 2009. One third (36 per cent) of the entire Swiss population now miss out on conventional news altogether.

Fög refers to “global surfers”, whose share of the total population has increased from 16 to 23 per cent. Global surfers do not subscribe to paywall news sites either and prefer to read online news from foreign sources. Fög’s findings show that media consumption has grown overall, but it is mainly the global technology companies that benefit from this through their communication platforms.

(TP)



Manuel Puppis:
“A regional take on national events barely exists any more.” Photo provided



As a result of the media crisis in Switzerland, publishers such as Tamedia now supply numerous local newspapers with identical content.

Photo: Keystone

and its French-speaking equivalent “Bon pour la tête” rely on good journalism to reach their respective communities. However, they are part of what is still a niche market. “As is the case with traditional media, all new online portals ultimately face the conundrum of how to pay for journalism. No one has found an answer yet.”

Controversy over the new Electronic Media Act

The Federal Council has also recognised that something needs to be done. Last summer before her resignation, media minister Doris Leuthard (CVP) gave the green light for consultation on the new draft Electronic Media Act (EMA), which stipulates that the 365 Swiss francs that every Swiss household pays for public service broadcasting apply not only to radio and television but also to online media, provided that the content is primarily audiovisual. By differentiating, the Federal Council wants to protect the press from subsidised competition.

Switzerland’s publishers are sceptical about the Federal Council’s proposals – nor do they want any direct press subsidies for that matter. Instead of “subsidising new online services that distort the market”, the federal government should instead help the private media sector to “manage the digital transformation”, writes the Swiss Media Association, which is headed by Tamedia’s Chairman of the Board of Directors, Pietro Supino. Specifically, publishers are calling for indirect press subsidies to in-

crease markedly from 30 to 120 million Swiss francs per year. In addition to reducing postal tariffs, such subsidies would help to pay for early-morning deliveries of daily newspapers. This would benefit all the major publishers – including the Tamedia Group, a company that made a net profit of 170 million Swiss francs in 2017. Switzerland’s biggest media company generates earnings through commercial digital services such as the job advertisement platform Jobeloud. Critics accuse Tamedia of no longer investing in its actual core business – journalism – while still insisting that the government provide indirect subsidies.

However, in his capacity as President of Media Forti, Puppis says that the EMA is a “missed opportunity”. Media Forti is a civil society organisation that supports media policies “in the public interest” as well as “democracy-relevant journalism for the digital age”. In particular, Puppis believes that the EMA is squandering the chance to secure direct funding for online journalism as a whole, not least because this would also enable local and regional newspapers to keep pace with digitalisation.

Furthermore, the EMA might potentially be a source of party-political friction. Switzerland’s conservative-leaning parties want fewer media subsidies, while their counterparts on the left want more. Parliament is unlikely to look at this contentious issue before the end of the year – unless Leuthard’s successor, Simonetta Sommaruga (SP), has a rethink.

Collapse of the French-language press

With redundancies, closures and editorial staff fusions, one thing is clear: Switzerland's French-language press is in trouble. Initiatives have been undertaken but the unifying role of newspapers is in danger, confirms one media analyst.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

"If things continue like this, there will be more journalists in unemployment than there are left reporting on the restructuring!" This was the view of Sami Kanaan, mayor of Geneva, at a municipal council meeting towards the end of 2017. French-speaking Switzerland no longer has enough readers or funding to sustain its many newspapers.

In summer 2018, the closure of "Le Matin" left 41 jobless. This came just one year after the closure of "L'Hebdo". Two icons of the Swiss press were already closed during the 1990s – "La Suisse" and the "Journal de Genève" – followed by "Le Nouveau Quotidien". Even if the exact figures have not been shared, generally speaking, newspapers are struggling. The media group Tamedia concedes that the "Tribune de Genève" is losing money. And it's the same for "Le Temps", even if that hasn't been confirmed. It looks like "Le Matin Dimanche" is also starting to lose ground," says Alain Maillard, editor in chief of the media trade union publication, "Edito", until the end of 2018.

Heading towards a single French-language newspaper

"24 heures" and "La Tribune de Genève" have fused parts of their editorial teams to create one main editorial staff working under their publisher, Tamedia. This staff also includes journalists from "Le Matin Dimanche". "All that's left for these individual newspapers is the local news, as it's the only

thing that can't be completed elsewhere. It could end up turning into one single French-language newspaper," reflects Fabio Lo Verso, media analyst and former director of the newspaper "La Cité", which closed at the end of 2018.

The cause of these losses is both a crash in advertising revenue, with advertisers migrating towards sales platforms like Ricardo, and eroding readership, particularly amongst the younger generation. "They no longer pay for news," explains Maillard. He also highlights difficulties in adapting to digital formats as a further issue for newspapers. The digital transition may well reduce production costs, but this reduction does not necessarily compensate for the lower return achieved from online advertising.

Regional press as a tool of democracy

Maillard and Lo Verso are calling for public support for the press, perhaps by way of an amendment to the Constitution. They note that news coverage of public affairs is holding out, notably thanks to the public service offering. Maillard points out: "The regional press provides access to information for a great number of people, which is necessary for democratic debate."

Surviving newspapers and new media

Certain newspapers are nevertheless managing to survive amidst the difficulties. "La Liberté" in the canton of Fribourg, for example, which is partly publicly-owned. "Le Courrier", based in Geneva and with a readership of 7,000, is managing to continue its fight thanks to the support of its subscribers. The online and print publication "Heidi.news" will be presenting scientific journalism from the spring onwards and will be headed by Swiss journalist Serge Michel, who previously worked with the newspaper "Le Monde". He has received the support of Tibère Adler from the Avenir Suisse think tank. "The primary funding has been received from the founders," states "Heidi.news". Finally, journalists from the defunct "Le Matin" are reportedly looking into an original concept involving collaboration with cafés and restaurants.



People in French-speaking Switzerland were outraged at the closure of some well-known media outlets. Their protests were in vain. Photo: Keystone



Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Montreux

The 97th Congress of the Swiss Abroad will take place from 16 to 18 August 2019 in Montreux (VD) on the banks of Lake Geneva, surrounded by vineyards and against the breathtaking backdrop of the snow-covered Alps.

This congress, with the theme “*Quel monde pour demain?*” (“What will tomorrow’s world hold?”), will provide an opportunity to reflect on social, political and economic realities, as well as unemployment, current migratory situations and even the mobility of the future. What major challenges will society be facing and how can they be tackled? How can we begin to respond to these issues today? The programme includes interesting debates involving leading personalities from the world of economics, science and Swiss politics. A highlight of the congress will be a speech by a member of the Federal Council.

During the congress, participants will also have the chance to meet compatriots from around the world, learn about current news and events in Switzerland and discuss their respective experiences. Sightseeing tours of world-renowned sites and a political programme conceived especially for the Swiss electoral year will top off the agenda for this 97th Congress of the Swiss Abroad.

You will find further information regarding registration procedures on our website: www.ose-congres.ch. Save the date now, so that you can participate in the 97th Congress for Swiss Abroad in Montreux! (AC)

Swiss Travel System has a special offer open to those participating in the congress:
75% reduction on the cost of a Swiss Travel Pass.

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

Nine different summer camps for children aged 8 to 14

Swiss children living abroad will have an opportunity to get to know Switzerland and its culture – and have a great time – at two-week summer camps between the end of June and the end of August 2019.

Run by the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA), these camps offer the chance to explore lakes, mountains, rivers and countryside on foot, and visit various sights and cities. Games, sports and workshops will also feature strongly among the daily activities.

Children at the camps will learn a lot about their home country – from traditional songs and cooking recipes, to typical Swiss games and sports. One of this year’s highlights is our music camp (27 July to 9 August) for children who are interested in music and want to learn more about Switzerland’s musical diversity. You don’t need to play an instrument to participate – you just need to enjoy music.

The camps all have one thing in common in that children of similar age from different countries meet and interact with each other across the linguistic, cultural and geographical divide. They are a chance to make new friends and share unforgettable memories. For a full schedule and further details as well as the relevant application form, visit www.sjas.ch/en/camps. Alternatively, we can send you a comprehensive overview of our camps by post on request.

The FYSA wants to enable all Swiss children living abroad to visit and experience Switzerland for themselves at least once. We therefore offer price reductions whenever these are justified. Simply fill in the “Application form for reduction of the camp fees”. We will also be happy to help if you require any further information. (LR)

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA), Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne.
 Tel.: +41 (0)31 356 61 16, fax: +41 (0)31 356 61 01, email: info@sjas.ch, www.sjas.ch

Bank details for voluntary subscriptions

Readers of the printed version of “Swiss Review” may sign up for a voluntary subscription if they wish. This support will help the editorial team to keep supplying the magazine on paper in the quality to which you are accustomed. The bank details for the transfer of voluntary subscriptions are as follows (please note: **cheques cannot be cashed**):

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Inclusion in the electoral register is easy

You can live abroad but still vote on Swiss matters. Doing so helps strengthen the bond with your native country. But to exercise your political voice, you must be included in the electoral register.

Some 752,000 Swiss live abroad, of whom a large proportion – around 600,000 – are older than 18 and therefore entitled to vote under Swiss law. However, many do not avail themselves of the political rights that Switzerland grants to its expatriate citizens. Last year, the electoral register contained the names of 174,000 Swiss Abroad. Many who have not voted to date may well be wondering how they can get their names on this register now that the election year is under way.

How to qualify

The procedure is relatively easy and only needs to be completed once. After being entered in the register, you will always receive the necessary ballot material automatically by post. The statutory requirements for being entered in the electoral register are also quite simple: you must be at least 18 years old, your permanent residence must be abroad, you must be registered with the Swiss representation in your country of domicile, and you must not be legally incapacitated from voting. There are no further conditions. Neither will you incur any fees for this. Furthermore, you pay nothing for the privilege of voting per se – or almost nothing: if you are unable to vote electronically, there is still the small matter of covering the cost of postage when returning your ballot papers.

How to proceed

Voting in Switzerland helps you to develop an even closer connection to your native country. The fact that Swiss Abroad are always entered in the electoral register of their most recent Swiss commune of residence further accentuates this bond. If you have never lived in Switzerland, you will be registered with your Swiss commune of origin. The name of your commune is one of the items of information



that you will need when going about the simple business of getting on the register. The “Application to exercise political rights” is a straightforward form that you can download online, fill in by hand and send to the Swiss representation in your country of domicile.

Numerous opportunities to participate in Swiss democracy

Swiss who live in Switzerland can exercise their democratic voice in many ways, and are able to shape political discourse at communal, cantonal and federal level. The rights of Swiss Abroad are not quite as wide-ranging. Expatriates can vote at national level. Apart from casting their ballots, they also have the right to sign petitions calling for referendums or popular initiatives, as well as the right to run for election to the larger chamber of parliament, the National Council (see also page 18). Ten cantons – Berne, Basel-Landschaft, Fribourg, Jura, Geneva, Grisons, Neuchâtel, Solothurn, Schwyz and Ticino – also grant voting rights at cantonal level to their citizens living abroad.

As mentioned above, entries in the electoral register are permanent and do not need to be renewed. They are valid for the entire time that you are abroad. However, you can ask to have your name removed from the register, by writing to the Swiss representation in your country of domicile. Note that your name will also be deleted from the register if your voting papers cannot be delivered three times in a row. Even if this occurs, it is still possible for you to get back on the electoral register without any problem.

More often than not, people in Switzerland either submit their ballots by post or prefer the old-school method of voting at the ballot box. What electronic voting will look like in future continues to be the subject of lively debate

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within Switzerland. E-voting is of particular benefit to Swiss Abroad, given that Swiss expatriates often do not receive voting papers sent by post until very late, thus making it difficult or sometimes impossible for them to return their ballots in time. This is why the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad submitted a petition at the end of 2018 calling on the Federal Council and Parliament to allow all Swiss Abroad to vote electronically. (MUL)

Application to exercise political rights (multilingual document in English, German, French and Italian) <http://ogy.de/register>

Experience politics and culture up close and personal – just right for you

Are you interested in Swiss politics? Would you like to experience a fantastic cultural and sports programme in your native country? If so, our Politics and Culture Camp is the right place for you.

In the run-up to the Swiss Abroad Congress in Montreux, a two-week summer youth camp will be held with a political and cultural focus on the topic of “What will tomorrow’s world hold?” and the 2019 parliamentary elections. During this camp, you will experience Swiss politics up close – explained simply, concisely and objectively. In addition, this summer camp is focused on your native country and all it has to offer, including lovely mountain landscapes, impressive historic cities and a great deal of culture.

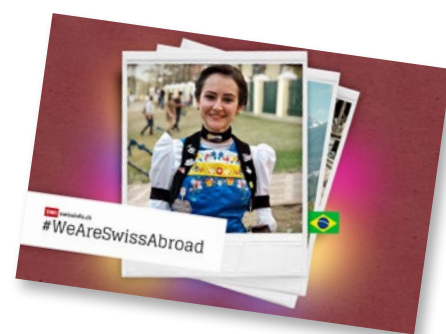
You will spend two weeks with other young Swiss expatriates, over-nighting at youth hostels, campgrounds, farms and even under the stars around a campfire. Whether you find yourself exploring Switzerland by train, bicycle or hiking through the mountains, it will definitely be a memorable time.

The camp costs 1,030 Swiss francs. This includes the programme, accommodation, food, excursions and travel. It will be held from 3 to 18 August 2019 and is designed for young Swiss expatriates aged 15 to 21. Are you eager for a summer full of variety in Switzerland? If so, register today! (DB)

Information and registration

More detailed information and registration forms for this as well as other camps can be found at www.swisscommunity.org/youth or www.aso.ch. The Politics and Culture Camp is organised by the Youth Service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Bern; telephone +41 (0)31 356 61 00, e-mail: youth@aso.ch

THE SWISS ABROAD ON INSTAGRAM



“Our traditions keep us united and define us”

Twenty-seven-year-old Heidi Amstalden Albertin lives in Helvetia, Brazil – a Swiss colony that her ancestors helped to found. Today, she helps keep Swiss traditions alive through food, festivals and folk dancing.

My job: I graduated from law school and worked as a lawyer for a while. Now I am a public servant, more specifically a judge’s assistant at the Tribunal de Justiça do Estado de São Paulo (Court of São Paulo State), and I am very happy with my job.

My Brazil: I live in Helvetia, a Swiss colony in Brazil founded in 1888 by four Swiss immigrant families. Our traditions keep us united and define us, and therefore we keep them alive. Tradition is present even in the name of our main celebration to commemorate the Swiss National Day: “Festa da Tradição”, which translates as “Tradition Party” or “Celebration of Tradition”.

My Switzerland: I have been a member of a Swiss folk dance group (Tanzgruppe Helvetia) since I was four years old, and in 2010 we took part in the Eidgenössisches Trachtenfest (Swiss National Costume Festival) in canton Schwyz. The biggest differences with Switzerland are the lack of security and economic instability.

My heart: My great-great-grandfather, Benedicto Amstalden, was a Swiss citizen from Sarnen in canton Obwalden and one of the founding fathers of Colônia Helvetia. To carry his name is a source of pride and a way to preserve his heritage, heroism and great accomplishments. I will keep working to keep the traditions brought here by him alive.

The original interview was published on swissinfo.ch, the online service of the Swiss Broadcasting Company, which is available in ten languages. Do you live abroad too? Then tag your Instagram photos [#WeAreSwissAbroad](https://www.instagram.com/hashtag/weareswissabroad).

Living and working abroad

Emigrating to a new country is no walk in the park. Moving abroad requires a great deal of preparation.

This is why the Consular Directorate of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) has set up a website **www.swissemigration.ch** that summarises the things you need to bear in mind when planning your exit from Switzerland. Students, employees and pensioners can go online to access numerous guides and country-specific dossiers as well as a dedicated checklist. The website is also a useful source of information for Swiss who already live abroad – especially those who are planning to return to Switzerland.



Emigrating

You can go online to learn about the many different steps that you need to take before and during the process of emigrating to a new country – such as liaising with your local registration authority, or handling taxes, AHV/IV, health insurance, and formalities related to entry and stay.

Resources include guides related to travel abroad, emigration, retirement abroad, learning a language and studying abroad, working and searching for jobs abroad, and much more besides. Dossiers on the EU, the USA, Thailand and 18 other countries are also available.

If you are still unable to find the information you require, you can call or email the FDFA helpline free of charge. The Swiss representations abroad can also assist you.

> www.swissemigration.ch



Networking

With the advent of online services and social networking tools, it is becoming ever easier for expatriates to maintain and strengthen links to their native country.

Useful interfaces include the websites of various federal departments of the federal administration as well as newsletters and social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) of numerous Swiss representations abroad.

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) publishes the "Swiss Review", a website and a newsletter in addition to running the SwissCommunity.org platform. OSA brings together a network of Swiss expatriate associations that offer a variety of events and information to their members.

- > www.youngswissabroad.ch
- > www.revue.ch
- > www.aso.ch



Returning

Planning your return to Switzerland requires just as much thought as emigrating abroad. Essentially, it is the same procedure in reverse. Particularly people who have been away from their native country for many years need to be aware of this.

The "Returning to Switzerland" guide provides useful advice on looking for jobs in Switzerland and contains general information about the repatriation process.

> "Returning to Switzerland" guide (www.eda.admin.ch > Living abroad > Publications and statistics > Returning)

You can access and consult these websites at the click of a button via the online edition of the "Swiss Review".

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itineris


Online registration for Swiss citizens travelling abroad
www.fdfa.admin.ch/itineris



Plan well.
Travel well.

App available for free for iOS and Android

Federal and cantonal popular votes – everything in one app

 **Vote Info** The Confederation and the cantons have launched VoteInfo – a new app that provides you with official explanatory information on federal and cantonal popular votes and allows you to keep track of results via smartphone. The popular vote of 10 February 2019 marked the app's debut.

Supplementing the voting papers that are sent to all eligible voters as well as the information that is available on federal government and cantonal websites, the new app now means that you can consult all the official explanatory information on the forthcoming issues for several weeks before each popular vote – all from a single source. The app also contains details of previous votes.

Results available from noon

But that's not all. On voting Sundays, VoteInfo will begin publishing all the results of federal and cantonal popular votes from 12 p.m. onwards (Swiss time) for every commune and canton as well as for the whole of Switzerland.

Automatic notifications

VoteInfo offers another advantage in that you can set up push notifications to appear automatically whenever the app has new content, e.g. when new explanatory information or videos are published, or when the final results are announced on voting Sunday.

The new app not only contains explanatory information and results, but it can also be adapted to your preferences. For example, it allows you to bookmark content that is specific to your own canton.

Available in four languages

The Federal Chancellery developed the VoteInfo app in partnership with the Federal Statistical Office (FSO) and Canton Zurich. The latter had previously launched its own dedicated "Züri stimmt" app, the contents of which have now been integrated into VoteInfo. Available in Switzerland's four official languages (German, French, Italian and Romansh), the app works on iOS and Android and can be downloaded from the App Store or via Google Play free of charge.

Further improvements

The federal authorities and the cantons intend to continue developing VoteInfo. For example, one future objective is to include information on communal votes.

Federal votes

The Federal Council determines voting proposals at least four months before the voting date. The following proposals will be put to the People on 19 May 2019:

- Federal Act of 28 September 2018 on Tax Reform and OASI (AHV-IV) Funding
- Federal Decree of 28 September 2018 on the Approval and Implementation of the Exchange of Notes between Switzerland and the EU on the adoption of Directive (EU) 2017/853 amending the EU Weapons Directive (Development of the Schengen acquis)

Other voting dates in 2019:
20 October, 24 November

Everything you need to know about the proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by Parliament and the Federal Council, electronic voting, etc.) is available at www.admin.ch/votes. For information about the National Council elections of 20 October 2019, visit www.ch.ch/en/elections2019.

Popular initiatives

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

- "Stop arms exports to countries engaged in civil war (Corrective Initiative)" (11/6/2020)

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

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In the control room, a year before the accident (1968)

An eerie calm – tunnels in the damaged Lucens reactor

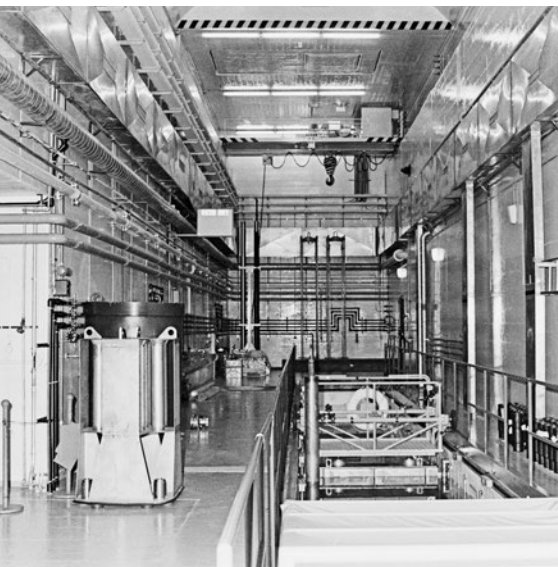


Technicians being dressed in protective clothing shortly after the accident

Swiss reactor meltdown

If, Heaven forbid, there was a nuclear meltdown today and the Geiger counters went off the scale, pictures of the accident would be flashed around the world within hours. Which is why the photos of Switzerland's biggest-ever nuclear accident are a little disconcerting. Only now – 50 years later – have these visual reminders seen the light of day – belated proof that the “power of images” we hear so much about is sometimes never felt.

The interior of the reactor in January 1969



Corridor leading to the radioactive interior of the Lucens reactor

What happened? A core meltdown, a severe nuclear reactor accident, occurred at the Lucens underground nuclear reactor (in the canton of Vaud) on 21 January 1969. The reactor was destroyed and the plant itself, built in a chamber inside a mountain, was severely contaminated. Switzerland narrowly escaped a nuclear catastrophe. In hindsight, there is an emotional edge to the unspectacular, strangely clean-cut images taken at the time. The discreetly handled accident in Lucens shattered Switzerland's dream of building nuclear power plants from scratch itself. According to recent historical research, the accident was also a major factor in Switzerland shelving plans to develop its own atomic bomb. In 1958, the Federal Council publicly stated that the army needed to have the most effective weapons at its disposal to protect Switzerland, “including atomic weapons”. Historian Michael Fischer, who is conducting research on the matter, believes that the Lucens reactor could have bred the plutonium needed for weapons. Historian Jürg Stüssi-Lauterburg, who was able to access files that remain confidential, says, “Yes, Switzerland was a nuclear threshold state.” Lucens was the end point.

(MUL)

The photographs shown here are from Keystone-SDA's Lucens image database. Numerous Swiss media outlets published them this year.



Nearly a decade later Lucens was the scene of anti-nuclear movement demos (1978)

Former President dips into marine literature



DIDIER BURKHALTER:
"Mer porteuse".
Editions de l'Aire, 2018,
194 pages,
CHF 24.-, Euro 24.-

Written near Lake Neuchâtel, Didier Burkhalter's third novel, "Mer Porteuse", offers poetic prose set within the context of questions surrounding family ties and the strength of our origins. In this story of an abandoned child, the Atlantic Ocean becomes a character in its own right: a symbol of separation, yet also a form of connection for human beings. The former Federal Councillor writes beautifully, as displayed in a passage in which the plumes of smoke from an ocean liner create a lifeline attaching the vessel to the sky, "as if it were afraid of being snatched by the depths below". The novel's weakness is a certain linguistic sluggishness or pomposity that deems indifference necessarily

"crass" and that inevitably presents readers with an "ocean of despair" engulfing one of the novel's characters.

It is of course tempting to search for the liberal political viewpoints tucked beneath the prose of the author, former President of the Confederation and Head of the Department of Foreign Affairs. For example, Enor, born of a lineage lost at sea, will become a lawyer but "without betraying his core values". This is to be expected as he comes from a family which renovated buildings, "providing work for companies which hired young and migrant workers". And of course, this housing was first and foremost allocated to families. Merit, family and humanity are thus the central convictions that bring the pages to life. Spirituality is also touched upon, with the theme handled through the personification of a wave. "Dispersed in a myriad of droplets, each a miniscule life of its own, it draws back, healing its wounds with the currents from the deep ...," is how the author imagines it.

But at times, with Didier Burkhalter's lyricism and love for maritime regions such as Finistère, combined with the original structure and an ability to create mystery and suspense, this oriented reading can easily be forgotten. Readers are then left with the story of Kaelig and the orphaned Gwellouen, European migrants heading to the New World in a century of revolutions. How does she perceive her future spouse? "He is different from the others that measure her up, viewing her as a pretty flower to be picked, to be possessed quickly and without love and later to be left to wilt, slowly, devoid of hope, in a stagnant life, and then to dry out; a flower that has never had its own soil, that has been ripped up and cut away, that will never be able to grow back."

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Traditional, delicate and heartwarming



MARIE CLAUDE CHAPPUIS
& FRIENDS: Au cœur des Alpes,
Volkslieder aus der Schweiz,
Sony 2018

This is quite the CD – the silver disc is actually green! But don't worry, it's not a garish green but rather green as grass. And before you finish admiring the optics, the acoustic thrills begin. "Guggisberglid", "Le vieux chalet" and "Liauba" are all classic and enchanting Swiss songs. This wouldn't be out of the ordinary if the CD cover bore the name of Gölä or Maja Brunner, but it is Swiss opera star Marie-Claude Chappuis who is singing these delightful pieces. Sometimes softly accompanied by a guitar or the primeval tones of an alphorn, sometimes by the heartwarming sound of an accordion. And every now and again backed up by the rich male voices of the Choeur des Armaillis de la Gruyère.

The singer proved her huge versatility in 2017 with her CD "Sous l'empire de l'amour", accompanied only by the soft notes of a lute. The mezzo-soprano could dare such a feat with a voice so unbelievably beautiful, sensual, flexible and expressive. The French lute songs from the 17th century about the joys of love are thus transformed into highly emotional cameos. It was a highlight of her strongly goal-oriented career path. Chappuis spent her apprenticeship years at the Landestheater Tirol, where she experienced a singer's life on fast-forward. Her lucky break came in the form of Brigitte Fassbaender – a former opera singer turned artistic director in Innsbruck – who placed such trust in her. "That gave me a great deal of confidence. I was able to learn how to handle bigger roles with my voice very quickly," she said. She proceeded to perform on the world's stages, and baroque music became her world. "This gave me the opportunity to work with truly great conductors and with the best and most beautiful orchestras in the world."

Anyone who listens to the Swiss songs on the CD will not know whether they should sing along or simply listen in awe. On the one hand there is the self-confidence, authenticity and ease of Chappuis' vocals, balanced on the other by her artistry. Sony proudly announced before Christmas that the new album was once again in the top 20 on Radio SRF Musikwelle. At number 8, just two places behind a certain Gölä.

CHRISTIAN BERZINS

Patti Basler



She calls herself an “accomplished know-it-all”. After all, this farmer’s daughter from Aargau was a teacher and educationist before beginning her career as a wordsmith and cabaret artist. “Frontalunterricht” (Frontal Teaching) was the name of her first full-length stage show in 2016. On the side, she took part in slam battles and was runner-up Swiss champion at the 2018 Poetry Slam.

Now, Patti Basler is receiving the Salzburger Stier – the most prestigious cabaret award in the German-speaking world – presented in Meran, South Tyrol, in May. The jury praised the “hard-hitting directness” the 42-year-old Swiss native uses to expose the linguistic and political contradictions of our time.

Among Basler’s trademarks are her performances as the “instantaneous recorder” in the “Arena” programme on Swiss television, for example. She follows the debates live on location and summarises the votes at the end of the show – as poetry and rhymes and always with biting satire. She is not afraid of failure. “I simply don’t have time for it,” she says. The instantaneous format is absolutely ideal for her, since she suffers from self-diagnosed chronic procrastinitis. “You could say I have made a career out of procrastination.” Extreme time pressure seems to inspire her creativity.

Patti Basler has been on tour in German-speaking Switzerland since the beginning of March with her new “Nachsitzen” (Detention) stage show. Together with musician Philippe Kuhn, she explores humans as “beings learning in a worldwide classroom”. There are more than enough reasons for detention in life, but we all want to get back in the teacher’s good books. For Basler, the keyboard of life has more than just black and white keys, “it also has 50 shades of grey”.

THEODORA PETER

CHF 15 billion loss for the Swiss National Bank

The Swiss National Bank (SNB) announced in January that it expects to make a CHF 15 billion loss for 2018. This news is not a complete surprise, because currency fluctuations in particular had been fuelling expectations of an extremely negative result. The federal government and the cantons benefit from the SNB’s profit distributions and therefore take keen interest in the bank’s results. Such payouts are crucial for some cantons. Despite the record loss, the SNB is likely to pay the maximum possible sum of CHF 2 billion to the federal government and the cantons. This is due to the SNB’s high profit distribution reserves.

(MUL)

Skipping school in the name of climate protection

In January, thousands of pupils aged 12 and older held co-ordinated demonstrations against climate change in virtually all of Switzerland’s major cities, protesting at what they see as political inertia on this issue. Since the first demonstrations of this type began in December 2018, the student protest movement has rapidly grown. Activists are calling for a national declaration of climate emergency, zero net greenhouse gas emissions in Switzerland by 2030, and “systemic change” across the board.

(MUL)

Change affecting Swiss television

From 3 June 2019, you will no longer be able to receive Swiss television via an indoor or roof antenna. This change will also affect some viewers in neighbouring countries, who in future will only be able to receive SRG SSR broadcasts via the methods that most of us already use: cable, satellite or Internet. A website in the three national languages of German, French and Italian (<http://ogy.de/swiss-tv>) contains information and advice about the change.

(MUL)

Further increase in health insurance premiums

Swiss health insurance premiums have increased again in 2019 – this time by around 1.2%. However, the starting point for this rather modest increase was already high. Amounting to an average of CHF 4,464 per capita, premiums are onerously steep for many families and are the second most common reason for indebtedness. More and more voices within the National Council and the Council of States are now calling for tax deductions on health insurance premiums to be increased at the very least. However, any such move would have no effect in putting the brake on Swiss healthcare costs.

(MUL)



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Ufischöti, Lucerne, Lucerne-Lake Lucerne Region, © Stefan Ischumi

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Swiss Travel System.

