

# SWISS REVIEW<sup>+</sup>

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad  
July 2020



**After the coronavirus peak – time to  
make sense of it all**

**Paternity leave – more Swiss dads  
want to stay at home**

**Yenish and Sinti on the move –  
but are they accepted in Switzerland?**



# NO

## to the radical termination initiative

kündigung-nein.ch

On the 27th of September, the SVP's termination initiative will be voted upon. If adopted, it would force Switzerland to end the free movement of persons with the EU.

This would mean both permanent isolation and permanent restriction of our freedom of movement. In addition, the initiative automatically leads to the termination of all Bilateral I agreements without offering any viable alternative. In view of the current economic crisis and the legal situation of the Swiss living abroad in Europe, this is more than irresponsible.

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# A firm handshake

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Imagine a cattle market somewhere in rural Switzerland. A farmer is offering well-groomed calves and goats for sale. A potential buyer turns up. The farmer and the buyer strike a deal. They then shake hands firmly. This seals the deal and the price they have agreed. A handshake is as good as a contract.

Imagine a school class in an urban area. The school bell rings, and the teacher offers a handshake to each one of her pupils. By accepting the handshake, the girls and boys are showing respect for their teacher. Pupils in Switzerland who refuse to shake their teacher's hand have, on occasion, been taken to court in a bid to make them comply (which is probably neither smart nor conducive to fostering respect).

A 'friendly match' between the rival village football clubs starts to get rough. Two players lock horns. The referee tells them to shake hands and get on with the match. Both do what they are told – emulating what Europeans have done for over 2,000 years, ever since the Roman poet Ovid described the handshake as a sign of peace.

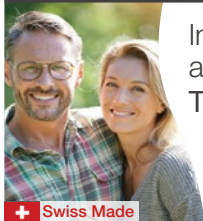
In Switzerland, the act of shaking hands is a small everyday gesture that helps to build trust – from handshakes following an argument, to the hesitant, tender holding of hands between a couple who have just fallen in love.

Unfortunately, handshakes are completely out of place in the current circumstances. We have had to stop doing what is second nature. Handshakes at school are no longer obligatory but off limits. A symbol of respect is now deemed to be unhygienic. This is an example of how the COVID-19 pandemic has taken away the simple things that we take for granted – in addition to shattering people's lives, futures and hopes. Even our everyday rituals have been turned on their head.

In this issue of "Swiss Review", we focus on the major social and economic convulsions currently affecting Switzerland as a result of the pandemic. But we also look ahead to 27 September 2020 – Switzerland's first 'super Sunday' since politics came out of hibernation. This time, the country's voters will be called to decide on as many as five important issues. One of these is the relationship between Switzerland and the EU, which is sure to be a very heated debate. The opposing camps are nowhere near close to shaking hands.

MARC LETTAU, CHIEF EDITOR





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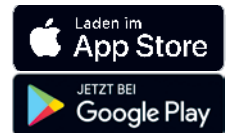
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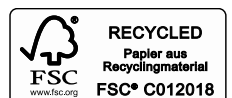
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## Feeling the heat in Swiss cities

I hope that a maximum of cities in the world will apply this Swiss urban model reorganisation. Good job guys.

ISABELLE PISLER, CANADA, VANCOUVER



This is such good news and an example for many other cities to follow. I like Singapore for the reason that it's a relatively cool place yet right on the equator. Highrise buildings create shade and funnel the sea breeze, whilst many

parks and trees provide the shade. Well done Switzerland!

FRANK BURTON, CAIRNS, AUSTRALIA

It's not just a question of planting trees. We also have to stop the proliferation of polluting cars, which have returned to the levels we saw before the temporary calm of the lockdown!

DANIELLE BEUCHAT, FRANCE

## Stephan Eicher – the Swiss troubadour



This man is exceptional! A well-rounded and accomplished artist, I've been following him for 40 years and have never been disappointed. I can confirm: he is a most impressive gentleman! Thank you and above all, keep going, please!

NELLY MENARD, AMBILLY, FRANCE

His music feeds my soul, my ears... and my admiration for Switzerland. And today, even from Patagonia, I listen to him and sing along with great affection. Thank you so much, Stephan!

MIGUEL MÁRQUEZ DÍAZ, OSORNO, CHILE

## The future of "Swiss Review"

*Readers have – or had – until 31 July to take part in our survey and help shape the future of our magazine. Many readers also took the opportunity to praise or criticise "Swiss Review" online. We will report on the results of the survey in a later issue. Link to survey: [survey2020.foeg.ch](https://survey2020.foeg.ch)*

The "Swiss Review" is a link which unites the Swiss Abroad with the country, especially for me, as I was born and grew up in France. I don't think I would have felt interested in Switzerland if it wasn't for this magazine. It is an excellent initiative and it needs to go on.

FLORIAN ZIEGLER, SAINT LOUIS, FRANCE

"Swiss Review" is my own little piece of Switzerland – a Switzerland that has and will always be close to my heart, based on everything my Swiss mother told me, my occasional visits to Switzerland, and the books that I have read. I think your magazine is fantastic. Hats off to the whole team.

PETER OSTOJA-ZAGORSKI, KLINGENTHAL, GERMANY

The "Swiss Review" is a bridge between the Swiss Abroad and this beautiful country. Personally, I would welcome more explanations of Swiss politics and the workings of the Swiss institutions.

SCHEIWILLER SYLVIANE, GESVES, BELGIUM

I started reading and enjoying your magazine during the 18 years that I spent in South America. In stylistic and journalistic terms, "Swiss Review" is a match for any of the major Swiss newspapers. I still think you could improve by being less afraid to criticise. There is no need to gloss things over – you should tell things as they are. Please also be less idealistic in what you cover. Otherwise, carry on what you are doing!

PETER EICHENBERGER, CATALONIA, SPAIN

"Swiss Review" is simply a waste of time. There are better ways to spend money.

ELSBETH MÜLLER, PAROS, GREECE

I really enjoy and appreciate the "Swiss Review". It gives us in the Swiss diaspora a good view of what is actually taking place in Switzerland. The quality of writing and research is excellent. Keep up the good work.

VIRGINIA LANGE WALTER, FLORIDA, USA

It is a pleasure to read each edition of the "Swiss Review." For the Swiss and their descendants living abroad, it is a way to feel close to this beautiful country, which we never stop missing. The content of the magazine is excellent: we are always met with interesting articles which inspire us to exchange our ideas and opinions with one another. This is especially true of articles on Swiss art, culture and news, which are topics that do not always reach us abroad in other media. Thank you for providing us with this way to feel close again.

EDITH NAEF, BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

I am thankful to be receiving "Swiss Review", because I don't read any Swiss newspapers. My advice: be a bit braver!

MILDRED HILBERDINK-FURRER, SENDEN, GERMANY





COVID-19 – a Swiss perspective

## Coronavirus in Switzerland – a story of discipline and of how much worse it could have been

Some 2,000\* people in Switzerland have died of COVID-19 – an undeniably heavy price. Tens of thousands have lost their jobs and futures. Hundreds of thousands will feel the effects of the pandemic on society and the economy for years to come. Nevertheless, many Swiss think it could have been worse. Time to make sense of it all.

\*) As of 1 July 2020 according to the analysis of the Statistics Office of the Canton of Zurich: 31,827 cases, 1,965 deceased

Always in the foreground (left): Alain Berset and Daniel Koch – the two prominent faces of Switzerland’s coronavirus peak.

Always in the background (right): Intensive-care teams such as this one at the La Carità hospital in Locarno – the canton of Ticino was particularly hard hit.  
Photos: Keystone



MARC LETTAU

Are things already back to normal? Many in Switzerland asked themselves this question at the beginning of June. Whereas places like Brazil were still very much in the throes of the pandemic, the Federal Council was swiftly lifting restrictions. Street cafes, river banks and lake shores were suddenly filled with life again. Shops reopened their doors. All accompanied by the unmistakable whiff of disinfectant.

Yet ‘normal’ this definitely is not. Everyday life is still riddled with the consequences of the pandemic. More than a third of all employees have been put on short-time working hours. Thousands have lost their jobs. Meanwhile, the spectre of a possible second wave hangs over us. The social and economic convulsions are likely to preoccupy us for years. It is too early to draw any final conclusions.

What we can do is speculate as to how Switzerland rode the epidemiological curve. Although the impact was hard and the pain and misfortune no less considerable, the general consensus is that the country dealt with the situation in an astonishingly effective and disciplined manner. Our disquiet at the surge in infections, not to mention at the sudden fragility of everything we take for granted, was no less pronounced than elsewhere. However, we came out of it relatively unscathed. This is because the vast majority of us followed the government guidelines and stayed at home. And because we learned to help others in myriad ways.

Ultimately, the fact that we responded in this way is a testimony to the Federal Council, who presented a united front at the beginning of the crisis, showed total faith in what the pandemic experts were saying, and remained con-

sistent and clear throughout. The government put the onus on individual responsibility, trusting us to stay at home and stay safe. There was no total lockdown or obligation to wear masks. Numerous press conferences remain ingrained in our collective consciousness: Health Minister Alain Berset implored us all to stay at home, and Switzerland’s pandemic guru Dr Daniel Koch coolly and calmly told the nation about what he knew and – even more importantly – about what he did not know.

Switzerland also provides an example of how important it is to be very well equipped for a crisis in material terms. A strong safety net was put in place. Government aid for individuals, such as compensation for short-time working, has been far more extensive than in many other countries. Support for stricken businesses has also been much more emphatic compared to neighbouring European states, with the Swiss government fully guaranteeing the emergency loans to which SMEs had unbureaucratic access via their banks. International media watched in wide-eyed wonder. “German CEOs can only dream of such things,” wrote the Munich-based news magazine “Focus”.

Yet it would be wrong to wax lyrical. Switzerland was no better prepared for the pandemic than other industrial economies. The country had a hospital pandemic plan in place at federal level, but the cantons had failed to implement this plan for monetary reasons. Stocks of essential medical supplies were far from full – they were half-empty. Our self-discipline also became frayed at the edges. In May, patience began to wear thin. The Federal Council finally brought this restlessness to an end in June.



Separated by a protective screen: son Daniel visiting father Reymont at a care home in Le Locle (left)

Spontaneous solidarity, socially distanced: donations for people in need in Zurich (middle)

Improvisation required: a makeshift hospital in the sports hall Rämibühl in Zurich (right) Photos: Keystone



## COVID-19 and the older generation

# The high-risk group

Older people felt the effects of the lockdown in particular. They received help and support from the rest of the population, but were also made scapegoats. The epidemic has put intergenerational relations to the test.

SUSANNE WENGER

Pro Senectute launched a campaign in mid-May, just as Switzerland began to ease the lockdown. The short video shows elderly people doing various jobs and activities – such as Lola (66) reading a bedtime story to her granddaughter, and Henri (84) trimming his neighbours' hedge. The clip ends with the tag line “Elderly and indispensable”. Pro Senectute is a Swiss non-profit organisation that has been serving the elderly for over a century. Its current campaign is a reaction to how COVID-19 has radically narrowed our view of older people. Anyone aged 65 or over belongs to the high-risk group. At the beginning of the crisis, the Federal Office of Public Health announced that elderly people were especially vulnerable and needed protection.

The infection statistics prove that the older you are, the more likely you are to die of COVID-19. But the disease also affects younger people, as we now know. Almost half of the people who ended up in intensive care in Switzerland were under 60. However, we knew less at the start of the outbreak in mid-March than we do now. The government urged older people especially to stay at home, avoid contact with others, and refrain from going to the supermarket. Barring exceptions, the elderly followed these instructions to the letter.

### Collective isolation

These instructions were issued on medical grounds. But they also had social consequences. Switzerland's over-65s, who account for a popula-

tion of 1.6 million, were sent into collective isolation. The cantons banned visits to care homes – a move that caused much anguish but failed to prevent fatalities. The overwhelming majority of older people in Switzerland live at home. Birthdays had to be spent alone, as the elderly suddenly found themselves cut off from the outside world. Pensioners were also unable to fulfil their societal duties. No more looking after grandchildren. No more charity work. Caritas Switzerland suffered volunteer shortages as a result.

A large proportion of Swiss pensioners do voluntary work. Many stay fit and active long after retirement, not least on account of good healthcare and a good quality of life. Their contribution to society is significant in a country that relies heavily on in-





dividual responsibility. For example, families and the government save eight billion Swiss francs a year on childcare thanks to the role of grandparents. In turn, the working population has been paying into the state pension system (old-age and survivors' insurance) for over 70 years. The intergenerational contract – the 'glue' that binds young and old – is a Swiss institution.

### “Made scapegoats”

COVID-19 put this contract to the test, and the outcome was double-edged. On the one hand, there was a great deal of goodwill. People went out of their way to help the elderly in many parts of the country. Young people frequently did the shopping for their older neighbours, for example. That the old ‘will soon die anyway’, regardless of COVID-19, was and is a cynical minority view. However, politicians and the media began to wonder whether the whole of Switzerland really had to shut down to protect the old and vulnerable. Some suggested that pensioners with secure incomes should foot some of the huge bill associated with the lockdown – other-

wise the younger generations would be forced to pick up the tab for a long time to come.

Resentment began to bubble among older people. While many accepted the restrictions with a certain sangfroid, the younger baby-boomer group who value their independence had particular problems adapting. No longer pillars of society, now they were nothing more than ‘at risk’ and a burden. Some received verbal abuse for not staying at home – although they were always allowed to go out in Switzerland. A 74-year-old man told Swiss television that this was the first time he had ever experienced discrimination. Why the backlash? Intergenerational expert Pasqualina Perrig-Chiello: “Older people were made scapegoats during this difficult time.” The crisis brought out the latent negative associations ascribed to older people.

### Implications for the state pension?

She says we have a “clichéd” view of the elderly: all frail, all well off. This view is far from correct. The Berne-based academic criticises politicians for also having helped to fuel this

stereotype. The longer-term impact of the coronavirus crisis remains to be seen. Intense debate surrounded the issue of ‘intergenerational conflict’ even before the outbreak. Switzerland has an ageing population. Solutions are needed for social welfare, nursing care, pension provision, etc. “NZZ am Sonntag” believes that competition for a slice of the cake will increase after COVID-19. Young people need more support and the intergenerational contract looks shaky, argues the newspaper.

If anything, Perrig-Chiello thinks that the epidemic has proved how little the different generations are acquainted with each other on a societal level. Yet the Swiss have shown a remarkable amount of intergenerational solidarity in her view, “regardless of what the media say”. This is something on which to build. “Then we could renegotiate the intergenerational contract on a more rational basis.” Older people can also play a part, as the epidemic itself shows. The retired doctors and nurses who returned to the front line are perhaps the best example.



COVID-19 and the Swiss job market

## “Help is on its way” – Switzerland’s multibillion bailout

COVID-19 brought parts of the Swiss economy to a standstill, affecting a third of all employees. Tens of thousands of shops had to close. Almost two million people were put on short-time working hours. The Federal Council drew up an unprecedented financial support package.

THEODORA PETER

In Namgyal Studer’s words, the lockdown was a “huge shock”. Studer owns a hairdresser’s salon in Berne. Her business was going well. From one day to the next, she had to shut up shop, cancel customer appointments and send her two employees home. Tens of thousands of shop owners, tradespeople, restaurateurs and other service providers shared this predicament in mid-March. Some 190,000 businesses around the country – including Studer’s private limited company – consequently applied to the unemployment insurance (ALV) to put almost two million employees on short-time working hours. The ALV subsidised 80 per cent of the resultant wage shortfall in order to prevent redundancies. More than a third (37 per

cent) of employees in Switzerland were furloughed in this way during the coronavirus crisis. In Ticino, the canton hit particularly hard by the epidemic, the proportion was more than half (54 per cent). Over 14 billion Swiss francs will flow from the federal coffers into the ALV in order to fund this bailout. Had the government not stepped in, employees would have faced higher wage cuts to prevent a welfare imbalance.

### Multibillion loans

“Help is on its way,” promised Economics Minister Guy Parmelin (SVP) at the beginning of the crisis. In addition to the furlough scheme, loans were used to keep businesses afloat. With minimal fuss, companies were

able to apply for emergency liquidity from their banks – covered by a government-guaranteed credit worth up to 40 billion francs. Hairdresser Namgyal Studer also obtained a small bridging loan. Despite a complete loss of revenue, this allowed her to pay her outstanding bills and give her two employees an advance on their wages before unemployment benefit kicked in. Studer herself received a lump-sum allowance during the lockdown, which the Federal Council had capped at 3,320 francs per month for all people in a position similar to that of an employer. She had been fretting for a long time about whether she would have to pay full rent for her salon during the six weeks she remained closed: “I hope my landlord shows some goodwill.”



The lockdown was a “huge shock” for Berne-based hairdresser Namgyal Studer. Thankfully, help was at hand (left).

Federal Councillor and Finance Minister Ueli Maurer put together a multibillion aid package (middle).

These protestors in Lausanne have no wish to return to the “abnormal normality” of pre-pandemic life (right).

Photos: Danielle Liniger, Keystone



Parliament finally came down on her side in June, because landlords are now obliged to deduct or waive a significant portion of the rent that was due during the government-enforced lockdown.

## Up to twice as many unemployed

The self-employed are in a precarious situation, with no entitlement to furlough. They were able to obtain compensation if the lockdown had prevented them from working or severely restricted their ability to work. Yet, for many, these allowances were barely enough to live on, forcing them to tap into their savings in order to make ends meet

Short-time working hours nevertheless allowed companies to avoid mass redundancies – in the initial few months at least. The number of unemployed rose to over 155,000 by the end of May – up 50,000 year-on-year. At the beginning of June, experts were cautiously optimistic that the nightmare scenario of up to 200,000 unemployed could be averted – which would have been twice as high as in 2019, when the jobless rate fell as low as 2.1 per cent at one stage.

## Severe recession likely

The consequences of the pandemic will hit the Swiss economy hard. According to the Swiss Economic Institute (KOF) at ETH Zurich, GDP will fall by 5.5 per cent in 2020. Unlike previous recessions, which mainly came at the expense of exports, service industries such as hospitality and tourism will also suffer this time. Business analysts predict a slow economic recovery from summer onwards. Due to the economic downturn, the Confederation, cantons and municipalities expect significant declines in tax revenue totalling more than 25 billion francs, says KOF. Coping with the fallout from COVID-19 has been extremely costly for the public sector. In some cantons such as Berne, there are increasing concerns that new austerity measures may be necessary due to the imminent hole in public finances. (TP)

## Controversial dividends

What caused considerable displeasure within parliament and among the general public was that companies were still paying shareholder dividends for the 2019 financial year despite the ALV subsidising most of these companies’ wage costs. The National Council voted in favour of a parliamentary motion calling for a ban on dividends during the furlough period. However, the Council of States ultimately blocked this decision, viewing it as an unacceptable restraint on economic freedom.

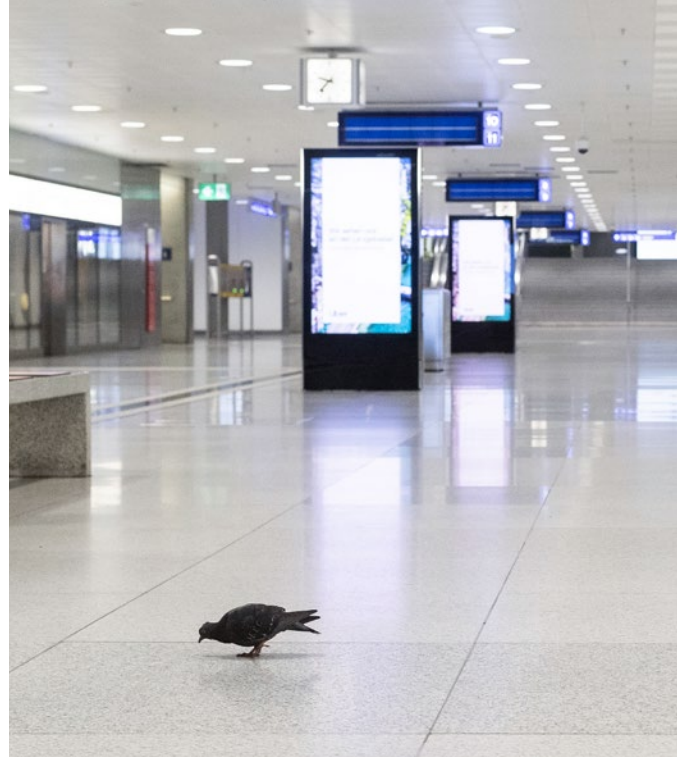
Studer can only dream of dividends. After six weeks in lockdown, she was able to reopen her salon at the end of April – naturally adhering to safety protocols. She had plenty of appointments during the first couple of weeks. However, her shop in Berne’s Länggasse university quarter relies on walk-in trade. It may be some time before students and staff pop in again for a haircut. Studer remains unperturbed. “I will take things as they come.”



A crisis is  
... when people panic-  
buy toilet paper.

... when Switzerland's  
biggest railway station  
is empty at rush hour  
(Zurich).

... when the floors are  
marked out with tape to  
maintain social distanc-  
ing. Photos: Keystone



COVID-19 and lockdown: a profound impact on the population

## The Swiss experience a new way of life

Our homes became the centre point of our lives. Our normal social and consumer habits were turned upside down. But the Swiss lockdown experience varied greatly depending on people's social situation.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Inside: safety. Outside: the virus. This is how the lockdown period was presented, beginning on 16 March and with restrictions relaxing significantly from 11 May, when the schools reopened. Over-

night, the Swiss population had to adopt a whole new way of life: gauging social distances, disinfecting hands, wearing a mask, and having work meetings online. "It took me a month to get used to a new rhythm at home," recalls Marie Céneç, a church

pastor from Geneva. "Habits are easy, but changing your behaviour is tiring," says the minister, who has been supporting the members of her parish via the social network, WhatsApp, sharing poems, prayers and intercessions directly with those suffering.

### Disoriented consumption

At the height of the lockdown, Swiss households increased their food purchases (+18.6%) as well as their consumption of services related to media and communication (+71.2%) and spending in supermarkets (+36.7%). In contrast, the Swiss halved their spending on clothing and reduced their spending on petrol by 22%. Spending in restaurants dropped by 53.8% and hairdressers saw a dramatic drop in activity (-80.8%). Cited by the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" (NZZ), these figures come from Postfinance, which analysed its 2.7 million clients' purchases between mid-March and mid-April. Online business boomed. In April, Swiss Post told the newspaper "Le Temps" that it was handling almost 850,000 parcels per day, indicating a 40% increase compared to the same period last year. Digitec Galaxus, managed by Migros, indicated that sales of fitness equipment and board games had almost quadrupled, while sales of erotic goods had doubled. (SH)

### A multi-speed lockdown

Fanny Parise, anthropologist and research associate at the Lemanic Institute for Practical Theology of the University of Lausanne, identified four groups within the population during lockdown. These archetypes are based on a study which started in March, involving 6,000 people divided equally between Switzerland and France. This unprecedented study shows that 46% of participants



considered the lockdown period to be a beneficial experience. These people were able to work from home or were working short-time hours with their income guaranteed. In contrast, 12% of participants declared that they had experienced an increase in their mental stress levels and a degradation of their living situation. Worse off still were the 34% of participants who lost their jobs or whose businesses had to close.

Parise compares the lockdown to a rite of passage and remarks that the perceived usefulness of social functions was inverted. “The enemy was faceless, and the heroes were, too: it was certain professions that took on this latter role. Cashiers became society’s linchpins and medical staff our saviours. Other professions, which are usually in the spotlight, saw their importance drop, notably in the commercial sector, where normally stressed individuals suddenly found themselves with time on their hands.”

“I was shocked by the difference in people’s situations,” agrees Céneq. “Depending on their age, location, and social and family situations, people have not had the same lockdown experience at all.”

### Stress or contemplation

Those who were not subjected to high levels of professional or family-based stress saw their days grow longer. They discovered idleness and meditation. “Staring at the ceiling or out of the window has been mentioned positively, whereas before it was considered as laziness,” says Parise. This group used its time to exercise, engage in DIY projects or cook. “With regard to food or alcohol consumption, people either indulged themselves or were very self-disciplined,” notes the researcher. This latter attitude may have been a reaction to the excesses of the world as it was.

“People of faith found that they were equipped to deal with anxiety, solitude and privation,” says the Geneva pastor. In the anthropological study, 46% of participants considered that the epidemic constituted the first sign of the collapse of the world. A further 51% indicated that they had looked for explanations other than those presented in the media. “Each citizen became a coronavirus expert, all the more so given that even governments themselves were learning about the pandemic from day to day,”

comments the French researcher. People of faith were able to fit this event into a pre-structured logic, “where the challenge is to overcome hardships, whilst knowing that we can hope to transform difficulties into opportunities for personal growth”, said Céneq. Some blamed the 5G network for the start of the pandemic in Wuhan. Others saw a worldwide conspiracy. For many, this pandemic was the result of harm done to the planet. “The story of the bat in the market in Wuhan which contaminated a human is very visual: it’s like a fable,” says Parise.

### Combating COVID-19 – what you need to know

**Keeping your distance; washing your hands; wearing a mask; testing and tracing** – the Federal Office of Public Health continually updates its guidance on preventing COVID-19 in Switzerland.  
**Further information: [ogy.de/corona-bag](https://www.bag.admin.ch/bag/en/topics/coronavirus/coronavirus-bag)**

#### Stranded abroad?

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs is helping to repatriate Swiss who are stranded abroad.  
**Further information: [ogy.de/corona-ed](https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/topics/coronavirus/corona-ed)**



Federalist and chaotic: homeschooling during the Swiss lockdown

## Equality of opportunity compromised

Around a million Swiss elementary school pupils had to do lessons from home during the lockdown. The same applied to 400,000 secondary and vocational school students. Distance learning was a challenge for all concerned. Many benefited from it. But not everyone.

MIREILLE GUIGGENBÜHLER

In the days immediately after 16 March, many parents' mailboxes suddenly filled up with emails from their children's teachers. All schools had closed on 16 March, and hurried preparations for homeschooling were under way. However, the academic material and work schedules sent to parents and their children not only differed from canton to canton, but from school to school and class to class.

Some teachers wanted to link up via video with their students every day. Others expected their classes to work through extensive multisubject material on their own. Some schools focused heavily on the traditional main subjects. Others preferred creative and artistic areas during this

challenging time. Every teacher more or less did their own thing. It was almost a caricature of Swiss federalism.

### Unclear from the start

Parents going through COVID-related upheaval in their own jobs found it hard to follow what their children were doing. Homeschooling objectives, priorities and rules appeared anything but consistent. Even the question of whether and how students would be assessed and marked during the lockdown generated different answers depending on whom you asked. For example, it was initially uncertain as to whether school-leaving examinations would take place at all. Basically, things were unclear from the start.

In normal circumstances, there are often advantages to the decentralised, highly federalist nature of Switzerland's school system. But now, some of its weaknesses were coming to the fore. The gap between schools has widened – and the effects of this have become more severe. This is the conclusion reached by the authors of the 'School Barometer' study at the University of Teacher Education Zug (PH Zug). Based on a series of questionnaires, the School Barometer assesses and evaluates the current school situation in Switzerland, Germany and Austria. Its findings over recent months suggest that homeschooling during the lockdown could have been detrimental for equality of opportunity among students. Specifically, the authors of the study fear that students



All schools remained closed (Golaten, canton of Berne). Children and parents contended with the double whammy of homeschooling and working from home. The lockdown was a challenging time for teenagers about to enter higher education or the world of work.

Photos: Keystone



from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds will be among

## Many teenagers are worried about not finding the apprenticeship they want

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it harder for Swiss teenagers to enter the world of work in Switzerland. After completing elementary school, 60 per cent normally start an apprenticeship. However, all trial apprenticeships had to be cancelled because of the lockdown. Interviews were also virtually impossible. Furthermore, many businesses put their employees on furlough while suspending recruitment. Consequently, fewer apprenticeship contracts were signed. New apprenticeships in French- and Italian-speaking Switzerland by early summer were a mere 30 per cent of what they were in 2019, while the corresponding figure in German-speaking Switzerland was also down on the previous year. "Our biggest concern is that businesses will suddenly no longer offer apprenticeships or terminate existing ones," says Theo Ninck, member of the government task force on vocational and professional education and training. Nevertheless, the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs is optimistic, saying in June that the apprenticeship market is more or less stable. (GUM)

those who lose out academically due to COVID-19. Children who live in cramped housing, receive no support from parents or siblings, or lack the necessary technology, risk falling behind with distance learning. The study revealed a 'scissor effect', whereby one sixth of students reported an alarmingly low level of effort consisting of less than nine hours a week spent doing school work, while almost a third of students reported doing school work for 25 hours or more per week – and in some cases for even longer than they would have done in a normal school week before the pandemic.

"The nationwide school closure has exacerbated the differences between students," says Dagmar Rösler, who chairs the umbrella organisation representing teachers in Switzerland, the LCH. What will Switzerland's publicly run schools now do as a result? The commitment to equality of opportunity across the board remains an important priority, given that the vast majority of Swiss children and teenagers attend publicly funded schools during compulsory education. Only 4.6 per cent go to private school.

Equality of opportunity as well as digitalisation are themes that tie in with distance learning and the effect that it is having on children's educational prospects. "For example, is it up to the state to ensure that all schoolchildren have access to the necessary digital infrastructure at home?" asks Rösler. There also needs to be a debate on the future of homework in her opinion, because the circumstances are similar. "Well educated parents can help their children. Less well educated parents cannot."

The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on future schooling are of little interest to the current generation of schoolchildren, whose perspective is a different one. Now back at school after weeks spent at home, many will be pleased to reacquaint themselves with the classroom, because interaction with their peers was one of the things that they sorely missed. Ultimately, only the future will tell how the coronavirus home-schooling experience has affected them.



Lingering images of the lockdown: the Swiss airline fleet virtually grounded; no tourists in the tourist magnet of Lucerne; Switzerland's coronavirus bike boom; and memories of sunny days spent on the balcony.

Photo: Keystone



COVID-19 has turned tourism on its head

## “Go on holiday in Switzerland”

Tourism in Switzerland was booming only last year. Overtourism became a thing. Yet many hotel rooms lie vacant this summer. The hospitality sector is pinning its hopes on domestic holidaymakers to alleviate some if not all of the shortfall.

THEODORA PETER

The spectacular high-alpine glacier view from Jungfrauoch is breathtaking, not least due to the thin air almost 3,500 metres above sea level. Europe's highest railway station – successfully branded and advertised as the ‘Top of Europe’ – attracted over a million visitors last year, of whom 70 per cent had travelled from Asia. Then the lockdown came in mid-March, bringing tourism to a standstill for almost three months. “For the first time since the First World War, our trains stood still for longer than the duration of an alpine storm,” says Jungfrau Railways CEO Urs Kessler.

The 58-year-old from the Bernese Oberland has worked at Jungfrau Railways for over 30 years and experienced many crises along the way. “9/11, SARS, swine flu, and the 2008 fi-

nancial crash – all these were nothing compared to COVID-19,” he says. Kessler broke off an advertising trip to Asia at the end of February to return to Switzerland – just in time. Two weeks later and everything had shut down. “2020 is turning into a really bad year,” he says.

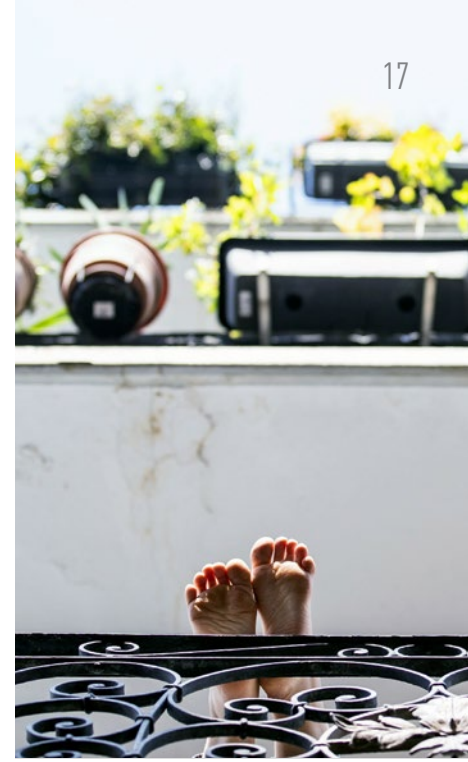
The virus and its consequences have had a severe impact across the entire tourism sector. Swiss hotels were excluded from the lockdown, but could not keep going after all other types of tourist infrastructure, including restaurants, were forced to close. “The situation has never been so alarming,” concurs Martin Nydegger, CEO of the Swiss tourist board Switzerland Tourism. His organisation predicts that the Swiss tourism sector will have lost up to 35 per cent in revenue by the end of the year. Not

all hotels and tour operators will survive the crisis. A quarter of all businesses could go under, he fears.

### Revenue down by a third

The Swiss Economic Institute (KOF) at ETH Zurich expects overnight stays to fall by around 30 per cent, with the absence of visitors from other continents of particular concern. More than half of last year's 40 million overnight stays were booked by foreign guests. Domestic guests can only partially offset the shortfall, even though the KOF expect ‘staycations’ to account for 10 to 15 per cent more overnight stays than they usually would in July and August. This increase will mainly benefit the mountain regions and Ticino. Urban tourism will lose out.





## Holiday advice from Finance Minister Ueli Maurer

The federal parliament has approved a 40-million-franc loan for the beleaguered industry. This money will fund marketing campaigns aimed at encouraging tourism in Switzerland. The Federal Council has not planned any special bailout measures. Instead, the government has asked people to show solidarity. “Go on a staycation and spend your money in Switzerland,” beseeched the finance minister, Ueli Maurer (SVP).

The next few months will prove whether we have listened, given that other European countries will also have been doing their utmost to attract holidaymakers. With Schengen states due to lift internal border controls on 15 June, some Swiss will also fancy going on another beach holiday. At the same time, Swiss hoteliers will hope to welcome more foreign guests.

## ‘Clean & Safe’ in Switzerland

Meanwhile, Switzerland Tourism have launched the ‘Clean & Safe’ label – a campaign aimed at cementing Switzerland’s reputation among foreign

and domestic holidaymakers as a clean and safe holiday destination. Hotels and tourism providers will use the label to indicate to customers that Switzerland also offers security and good healthcare in addition to pristine landscapes. Businesses that have implemented a safety plan in accordance with Federal Office of Public Health guidelines will be allowed to carry the label.

## Competitive pricing but lower revenue

Apart from the job of gaining trust, pricing will also play a role. Many destinations are running special offers. For example, Jungfrau Railways have a ‘Corona Pass’ which they hope will attract visitors from Switzerland. Despite the expected decline in revenue, Kessler believes that his company will “emerge from the crisis stronger than ever”. He says that 2021 will be a transitional year before things return to normal in 2022. Tourism experts from the University of St. Gallen believe that it will take almost three years for international travel to recover.

## Billions in aid for the Swiss aviation sector

The travel ban has left many airlines in financial straits – including domestic carriers Swiss and Edelweiss, whose planes have been grounded for months. Switzerland is providing its airlines with aid in the form of state guarantees worth up to 1.875 billion Swiss francs. This package includes around 1.2 billion francs in bank loans for Swiss and Edelweiss as well as 600 million francs for companies providing airline-related services such as cargo and baggage handling, maintenance, and catering. The companies assisted in the government bailout are not permitted to pay out dividends until the assistance has been repaid. These businesses must also adhere to government climate targets. The money is intended to help Switzerland’s airlines survive the coronavirus crisis and ensure that they continue operating. Swiss is a subsidiary of Lufthansa, which the German government plans to bail out with a 9-billion-euro rescue package. (TP)



Cabaret artist Patti Basler (left) had to cancel all her shows and produced coronavirus YouTube videos instead. Cartoonist Max Spring (right) had nothing to draw when the crisis began. Photos: Tibor Nad / Andreas Blatter



Humour during the coronavirus crisis

## When satire suddenly toed the line

COVID-19 is no laughing matter – as Switzerland’s satirists and cartoonists acknowledged this spring. But humour will always shine through eventually, even in the grimmest of circumstances, says cartoonist Max Spring.

MARC LETTAU

It was striking how quickly the mood changed among Switzerland’s comedians and cartoonists. In place of biting satire, the nation’s wits supported government guidance. “Avoid contact with other people. Stay at home. Wash your hands.” The ever cheeky cabaret artist Patti Basler reacted to the new situation by shooting a series of funny but educational coronavirus YouTube videos. “Never before have we satirists toed the government line as much as we did then,” reflected Swiss comedy doyen Viktor Giacobbo. Instead of poking fun, our comics complied like everyone else. Had the virus affected their sense of humour?

We quizzed Max Spring about this. What did the Berne cartoonist draw when the crisis began to unfold?

“I didn’t draw a single thing. It was like Armageddon. The situation was escalating every day. The existential threat seemed to be everywhere. It was no joke,” he told us. And there was simply no appetite for coronavirus cartoons among the newspapers. Instead of drawing, Spring hung on every word uttered by Federal Councillor Alain Berset and his coronavirus guru Daniel Koch. “I too was very happy about their uncompromising approach.”

It takes time for humour to find a voice, Spring believes. “A subject that is taboo one week can take on a life of its own the next. Humour needs the right moment.” The cartoonist is now free to chronicle the consequences of the pandemic, tongue firmly in cheek. Yet one thing remains off limits, he says: “Making fun of those who are

really suffering.” Humour will not miraculously make things better, so what is the point of it? Spring mentions climate change by way of an example, an even bigger disaster in his view. “We shouldn’t laugh about climate change, but we need to laugh despite climate change,” he explains. “We all have to keep smiling and laughing somehow.” But doesn’t the cartoonist risk becoming some sort of macabre court jester? No, he counters. “I don’t walk into my studio just to be witty. It is a job like any other – but I need a canvas to express myself. Maybe I am doing a little to help us confront these difficult issues.”



"Nothing will ever be the same" is the title of Max Spring's latest cartoon for "Swiss Review".

# The Swiss-Spanish wordsmith

How a poet from St. Gallen wrote in Spanish to earn a place in the annals of Swiss literature

CHARLES LINSMAYER

Can there be such a thing as an author who is inspired and sustained for a lifetime by a distant land in which they spent their childhood, and who can write so authentically and adroitly in the language of their former home that one of the greatest writers of said country, a Nobel Prize winner no less, expresses surprise at the “charm and tenderness” of the author’s stanzas? Yes, there can indeed. The author in question was Hans Leopold Davi, the distant land the Spanish island of Tenerife, where Davi was born on 10 January 1928 – the son of parents who had emigrated from Kaltbrunn (canton of St. Gallen). His prominent literary admirer was the Spanish poet Vicente Aleixandre (1898–1984).

## German premiere in Paris

Davi attended elementary school in Tenerife, before entering upper secondary school in St. Gallen at the age of 19 and going on to do a bookselling apprenticeship in Zurich followed by an internship in Paris. The Parisian printing house Georges Girard published Davi’s German-language debut “Gedichte einer Jugend” (Poems of youth). One of the poems in this work – “Nächtliche Heimkehr” (Nocturnal homecoming) – contained the following verse: “Where art thou, the unknown, / That nourishes my dreams? / Where art thou, the unnamed, / That gives me a home?”. However, Davi’s second work in 1956, “Spuren am Strand” (Trails in the sand), published by Diogenes, was a dual-language collection of poems written in Spanish and translated additionally into German by the author himself. “Kinderliedern” (Children’s songs), the 1959 work that so impressed Vicente Aleixandre, shared the same dual-language format, as did “Stein und Wolke” (Stones and clouds) in 1961 – and indeed all Davi’s poetry collections from then on until his final work, the dual-titled “Me escaparé por el Hueco de la Chimenea” / “Ich werde durchs Kaminloch entkommen” (I will escape through the chimney).

## Writing Spanish poems in Switzerland

The author, who lived in Lucerne with his wife, painter Silvia Davi, from 1953 until his death on 12 August 2016, produced poems of high spiritual concentration and tremendous lyrical intensity within their laconically minimalist linguistic genre. His works recall the great Spanish poetic tradition and remain clear and comprehensible at all times despite their occasional daring. They express wonderment

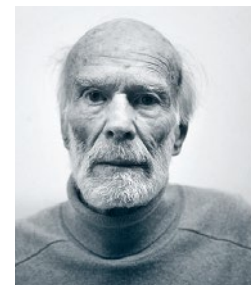
at life’s strange unfathomables and chronicle the author’s search for the “unknown God”. Mostly profoundly, almost all of them seek to achieve a deeper understanding of the meaning of life, death and love. However, Davi – a skilled translator who rendered works by Dürrenmatt, Hilde Domin and a whole string of Swiss authors into Spanish – never shied away from highlighting injustices just for the sake of aesthetics. He repeatedly addressed the horrors of the Franco dictatorship, while his 1990 poem about Argentina’s national library in Buenos Aires referred to the unpunished human rights violations committed during the military junta: “Or do humans in these and other parts of the world / maybe count for less than a book or a document?”. In 2000, Davi also criticised refugee policies that focus more on valid identity papers than actual human suffering.

## Not Swiss enough

Davi was highly respected in Spain but regarded in Switzerland as insufficiently Swiss. When the author offered to bequeath his works to the Swiss Literary Archives (SLA) in Berne in 2015, the SLA director replied saying that it was impossible to list him because no one in Berne could archive manuscripts written in Spanish. Until the very end, however, Davi refused to sacrifice his love of Spain, the Spanish language and the landscapes of his dreams for a received idea of Swiss patriotism. His “Gebet eines alten Mannes” (Prayer of an old man) in 1999 ended brilliantly with the following wish: “Being something: a whiff of morning breeze / a speck of dust from the North Star / a fleeting trace / in your brightest dreams”.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: “Ein Reisepass für das Wort” (A passport for words), 2000, is available from Orte Verlag, while the childhood reminiscences of “Erlebtes und Erdachtes” (Experiences and ideas), 2007, are published by Pro Libro, Lucerne.

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## HOME

This little pile of earth  
on which I stand  
and place my feet,  
and that other unknown,  
faraway land  
on which I do not stand,  
but to which my wings carry me!

Hans Leopold Davi, from “Spuren am Strand” (Trails in the sand), Diogenes, Zurich, 1956; out of print



## Voting ‘super Sunday’ in September

Following the cancellation of the federal votes that were scheduled for May, as many as five proposals – including the SVP’s limitation initiative – will now be put to voters on 27 September. As we re-emerge from lockdown, Switzerland’s relationship with the European Union (EU) is back on the agenda.

THEODORA PETER

COVID-19 also brought direct democracy to a temporary halt, causing the Federal Council to cancel a voting Sunday. The last time this happened was in 1951, when foot-and-mouth disease was the culprit. Apart from the voting topics that have been rolled over from 17 May, the electorate will decide on two other important issues this autumn: paternity leave and fighter jets (see pages 22 and 23). Federal Chancellor Walter Thurnherr said the vote-heavy September date was “manageable, if less than ideal”. Voting Sundays in recent years have repeatedly seen voters give their verdict on five or even more proposals.

The limitation initiative, put forward by the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), is the most controversial of all the autumn votes. If the SVP initiative is successful, Switzerland will either have to renegotiate or terminate the Swiss-EU Agreement on the free movement of persons. This might jeopardise the bilateral relationship between Switzerland and the

EU. Industry groups and all other political parties have been forceful in their opposition to what they call the “termination initiative” (see our article in edition 2/2020 of “Swiss Review”).

With the lockdown over, the cards have been reshuffled ahead of the votes. The predicted recession will lead to growing unemployment and a fall in government revenues throughout Europe. How people view the impact of the coronavirus crisis will be key, say commentators. Once borders reopen, will we pull up the drawbridge or prioritise our partnership with the EU? The Swiss have been in favour of the bilateral approach until now. It remains to be seen how the extraordinary circumstances of recent months will influence the public mood. No opinion poll results are available as we approach our editorial deadline. But one thing is clear: the vote will decide the future direction of Swiss-EU relations.

### Overview of all the votes on 27 September

- **Limitation initiative:** Switzerland should take back full control over immigration, according to the SVP’s “For moderate immigration” initiative. If the SVP initiative is successful, this would result in the termination or renegotiation of the Swiss-EU Agreement on the free movement of persons. **International mobility is of great importance to many Swiss Abroad. The Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), referred to as the Parliament of the “Fifth Switzerland”, made a statement regarding the limitation initiative after the editorial deadline for this edition of “Swiss Review”. To read it, visit [www.revue.ch/en](http://www.revue.ch/en) or [www.aso.ch/en](http://www.aso.ch/en)**
- **Swiss Hunting Act:** The Federal Council and parliament believe that relaxing the legislation that protects wolves and other animals will help to regulate the Swiss wolf population. According to animal welfare and nature conservation organisations, this revision of the Swiss Hunting Act goes much too far. See our lead article in edition 2/2020 of “Swiss Review” for more details.
- **Federal taxation:** The general childcare deduction on taxable income is to be increased from 6,500 to 10,000 francs. The Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP) has initiated a referendum in opposition to this reform. In its view, the increase will only help wealthy families.
- **Fighter jets:** Parliament has authorised the Federal Council to spend up to six billion Swiss francs on procuring new fighter jets. The Group for a Switzerland without an Army, the SP and the Greens are opposed. The referendum does not apply to any specific aircraft model. For further details, see page 22.
- **Paternity leave:** Fathers should receive two weeks’ paid leave in the first six months after the birth of their child. This indirect counterproposal to a popular initiative (that called for four weeks of statutory paternity leave but has since been withdrawn) is being contested by the SVP and the Young Liberals. See page 23 for further details.

# New fighter jets for Switzerland

Should Switzerland spend six billion francs on new fighter jets? Swiss voters will make their decision on 27 September 2020. It is a hotly contested issue, not least given the ‘crash landing’ suffered by the Federal Council six years ago.

MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER

The flight characteristics of the F/A-18 are well suited to Switzerland’s natural topography. Narrow mountain valleys and very short runways are no problem for this US-made Boeing aircraft. This, at least, is what the Swiss Air Force thinks. However, both the F/A-18 fighter jet and its counterpart the F-5 Tiger (made by Californian manufacturer Northrop Corporation) are past their best and need to be replaced.

Federal Councillor Viola Amherd (CVP), who has headed Switzerland’s defence ministry since the beginning of 2019, made her position clear shortly after assuming her role. She said that the purchase of new fighter planes is key to the future of the Swiss Armed Forces. Apart from buying new jets, modernising Switzerland’s

air defences also means investing in a new ground-based air defence system – without which the armed forces would be “unable to protect our country and people from airborne attacks”.

Parliament shares this assessment. Majorities within the Council of States and the National Council support Amherd’s wish that new fighter aircraft be procured for no more than six billion Swiss francs by the end of 2030. This investment would entail a compensatory arrangement, whereby the foreign companies chosen to deliver the fighter jets would have to do business in Switzerland equating to 60 per cent of the contract value.

Opposition to the aircraft purchases comes from outside parliament. The Group for a Switzerland



**For Viola Amherd, the fundamental issue is whether Switzerland still wants an air force at all.**

Photo: Keystone

without an Army teamed up with Switzerland’s left-wing parties and pacifist organisations to force a referendum on the matter, meaning that voters can now approve or reject the necessary six-billion-franc credit and the compensatory arrangements on 27 September 2020.

## No to the Saab Gripen

This is the second time within just a few years that Switzerland’s voters will have decided on whether the government can buy new fighter planes. Voters blocked the deal to purchase 22 Swedish Gripen fighter jets from Saab in 2014, with 53.4 per cent voting no. Just as now, it was the Group for a Switzerland without an Army and other organisations that had called a referendum opposing the transaction. Their main argument was that the Gripen would turn out to be much pricier for Switzerland than the quoted 3.1 billion francs, and that the existing fleet of F/A-18 fighter jets would suffice for aerial policing operations. They also said that it was unclear whether the new Gripen model – still in the development stage – would ever fly.

Six years on and things have changed. Whereas in 2014 the onus was on replacing Switzerland’s Tiger jets first of all, the fundamental issue now – at least according to the government – is whether the country still wants an air force at all. Compared to six years ago, the Federal Council has also taken a different approach by choosing not to earmark any particular successor model. The government

**The F/A-18 fighter jet – outdated for Swiss purposes.**

Photo: Keystone



## Many new dads want more days off

Switzerland has been discussing the introduction of paternity leave for almost two decades. Parliament has always stood in the way, but the mood is now changing. Voters could make a landmark decision in September.

has learned from the 2014 debacle: back then, aviation specialists called the Gripen ‘half-baked’. The defence minister at the time, Ueli Maurer (SVP), came under fire as boardroom infighting spilled over into the public domain. It therefore came as no surprise when the electorate said no.

### Amherd has widespread support

Another difference is that the current defence minister, Viola Amherd, is very popular in the opinion polls. The fact that she is well liked makes it easier for her to fight the Swiss Air Force’s corner beyond the usual conservative and centre-right spheres. And her messages seem to be working: a 2019 survey by ETH Zurich suggested that a majority of Swiss regard the armed forces as a necessity and believe that only just enough or even too little is being spent on defence.

Amherd’s military-sceptic opponents could have their work cut out this time, it appears. Referendum committee member Lewin Lempert disagrees, insisting that there is a very strong case for voting no. “The government is going into this venture blindly because it doesn’t know the aircraft model,” he says. The new fighter jets could also cost around 24 billion francs over their entire lifespan, he adds, claiming that figures from other countries back up this estimate. Furthermore, Lempert believes that it is hard to justify spending six billion francs on fighter jets during the current coronavirus crisis.

Whose arguments will hold sway? We will see in autumn.



**Hauke Krenz and his two children. The stay-at-home dad epitomises the change in society.**

*Photo provided*

MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER

Hauke Krenz received just one day of paid leave from his employer for the birth of his first child. That was five years ago. Afterwards, he would have had to return to work and leave his wife and newborn on their own. But Krenz was having none of it. “I would have felt bad otherwise,” says Krenz who lives in the Geneva suburb of Lancy. “I wanted to be a part of the family from the start. That means taking responsibility and building a close relationship with my child. One day of paid leave often isn’t even enough to be properly involved in the birth.”

Krenz, who is a qualified business economist, consequently used his annual holiday entitlement to be with his wife and child in the weeks fol-

lowing the birth. At the same time, he protested “in the strongest possible terms” to his employer about being unable to take any extended paternity leave. The same employer has since changed its family policy, having allowed Krenz to take ten days of paternity leave when his second child was born two years ago. Attitudes are evidently changing.

### Young professionals want attractive leave schemes

Krenz is by no means alone. Many young families in Switzerland now advocate the view that fathers also have an important postnatal role to play. Consequently, a growing number of Swiss companies are offering paternity leave in order to remain at-

tractive to young professionals. Pharmaceutical firm Novartis leads the way, giving new dads 90 days of paid leave. Companies such as Migros, Coop and Swisscom grant 15 days.

However, there has never been any legislation on paternity leave as such in Switzerland. The law only stipulates 14 weeks of maternity leave. Fathers can still only take one day off to be at the birth of their child. It is at the discretion of the employer as to whether employees also get paternity leave on top.

But things could soon be changing, with all fathers in future being entitled to take ten days of paid leave in the first six months after the birth of their child – either all at once or by the day. This, at least, is the voting proposal due to be submitted to the People on 27 September 2020.

## Over 30 unsuccessful motions

Paternity leave has been under discussion for years in Switzerland. Over 30 parliamentary motions calling for the introduction of paternity leave, or even parental leave shared between mother and father, have been submitted at federal level since 2003. Yet all of them have been unsuccessful. On each occasion the cost factor was the most important consideration. The federal government has calculated that the outlay needed to cover the latest paternity leave proposal would amount to 230 million francs per year.

A popular initiative that was submitted in 2017, advocating four weeks of paternity leave, is the reason why the Swiss electorate can now vote directly on a statutory ten-day period of



**“Swiss dads now play more of a hands-on role than they have ever done,” says trade unionist Adrian Wüthrich.**

Photo: parlament.ch



**“State-funded paternity leave does not necessarily turn you into a good dad,” says businesswoman Diana Gutjahr.**

Photo: parlament.ch

leave for new fathers for the first-ever time. The Paternity Leave Now! association withdrew the initiative a year ago to allow parliament to make a counterproposal of ten days instead. This is a compromise, but it still goes too far for some. A cross-party committee, formed in protest against “ever-increasing federal taxation”, collected enough signatures to force this autumn’s referendum.

## Fathers should be there for the long haul, say critics

Opponents of the proposal are under no illusions that the role of the father is changing in Switzerland. “Many young women today are highly qualified and want to continue working after childbirth,” says SVP National Councillor Diana Gutjahr, who runs a business herself and heads the referendum committee with other conservative and centre-right politicians. According to Gutjahr, the committee have no problem either with the fact that many fathers nowadays want to take on an active family role. Nevertheless, she adds: “Ten days of state-funded paternity leave does not necessarily turn you into a good dad. Being a father means being there for the long haul – or at least 18 years.”

The referendum committee also criticise two specific elements of the proposal, namely that the two-week period of leave would be funded under the same income compensation scheme originally related to maternity pay, and that the government, in their view, would be meddling in Switzerland’s liberal job market. “Our social security funds are already

in debt – we should not be adding to the strain,” says Gutjahr. “The aim of social welfare is to relieve financial hardship and not satisfy every last whim,” she says. Gutjahr also believes that companies would be deprived of the means of offering their own paternity leave to gain a competitive advantage.

## The yes camp want fathers to be there from the start

But it is these individual arrangements that supporters of the proposal have a problem with. “Dads need to be able to play an active role in family life right from the start,” says Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP) politician and chairman of the Travail Suisse trade union umbrella organisation, Adrian Wüthrich. “This applies to all fathers and not just those who can afford to take unpaid leave or whose employers already offer extended paternity leave. Switzerland is the only country in Europe with no statutory paternity and parental leave. Yet Swiss dads now play more of a hands-on role than they have ever done.”

Irrespective of the referendum, Hauke Krenz is convinced that it was the right decision for him to stay at home for an extended period when his children were born. “I think you forge a closer, more natural bond with the child that way,” he says. This bond is now even stronger, given that Krenz has since put his job on hold to look after his children full-time. “I don’t want to look back in ten years and regret having missed out on this time,” he says.



# Ray of hope for the Yenish, Sinti and Roma

Are social attitudes changing? A law discriminating against the itinerant way of life has been rescinded. Voters have approved a controversial camping site for itinerant people. And a survey shows that the majority of Swiss are accepting of the itinerant lifestyle.



MARC LETTAU

Switzerland is a cosmopolitan country full of minority languages and cultures. Yet the country's majorities and minorities do not always coexist happily. The Yenish and Sinti minorities have first-hand experience of this. In particular, those who live an itinerant way of life suffer from prejudice. Whenever groups of non-Swiss Roma arrive in Switzerland, the mood turns sour very quickly.

However, according to a representative survey published in March by the Federal Statistical Office and the Service for Combating Racism, the Swiss seem to be more accepting of the itinerant minorities than was generally thought. Some 67 per cent of those questioned consider the itinerant lifestyle of Switzerland's native Yenish and Sinti communities to be part of Swiss diversity, while 56 per cent believe that Switzerland should do more for persons with an itinerant way of life. Irrespective of these positive attitudes, the concerns of the itin-

erant Yenish and Sinti communities are no less significant than they were before. For example, the number of camping sites available to them is not increasing but declining, while proposals for new sites often fall victim to local opposition.

Feelings run especially high when authorities try to create new sites for non-Swiss Roma. Many Swiss Yenish and Sinti are in favour of such sites, because they have sensed how the vitriol directed against their non-Swiss counterparts is also meant for them. In their view, everyone therefore needs to have their own space for peaceful coexistence to work.

A debacle was looming in February, shortly before the aforementioned survey was due to be published. In the canton of Berne, all the signs were that voters would emphatically reject a proposed caravan site for non-Swiss members of the itinerant community. However, a 53.5 per cent majority of Bernese voters approved the loan needed to create the site, which

is situated near the farming village of Wileroltigen.

First this unexpected verdict at the ballot box, then the eyebrow-raising findings of the survey. Next came a landmark ruling at the end of April, when the Swiss Federal Supreme Court rescinded articles of the Police Act of the canton of Berne that discriminated against itinerant people. The passages in question made it possible to evict itinerant groups from private land very quickly and under threat of punishment without affording these parties the legal recourse to which they would normally be entitled in Switzerland. The Federal Supreme Court said that the clauses were unconstitutional. The Radgenossenschaft der Landstrasse, the umbrella organisation for Yenish and Sinti in Switzerland, called the ruling an "important step towards ensuring the protection of minorities in Switzerland", while the Society for Threatened Peoples said that the ruling had "set a precedent in combating discriminatory legal clauses".

Representatives of the Yenish, Sinti and Roma communities told "Swiss Review" that the Berne vote, the survey and the court ruling are encouraging "rays of hope" but nothing more. This is because itinerant people remain in a difficult predicament. Any goodwill towards them quickly evaporates once push comes to shove. For example, the Bernese electorate gave a clear thumbs up to the Wileroltigen caravan site while 91 per cent of voters in the village rejected it.

**Members of Switzerland's itinerant community who have been allowed to pitch up on a farm in Bäretswil (canton of Zurich).**

Photo: Danielle Liniger

Results of the survey on attitudes towards people with an itinerant way of life: [ogy.de/swiss-diversity](http://ogy.de/swiss-diversity)

# “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland” affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

The Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) has endorsed the idea of setting up a memorial to Swiss holocaust victims. It has also reiterated its call for an electronic voting channel while laying the groundwork to improve its own election procedure. These resolutions were passed by circular vote, because the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the CSA from holding a physical meeting.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been hampering Switzerland’s democratic processes since the beginning of March, causing the postponement of countless parliamentary meetings at municipal and cantonal level in recent weeks and months. Direct democracy has also fallen foul of the coronavirus. For example, the scope for collecting signatures for popular initiatives has been curtailed.

It therefore came as no surprise that the CSA, which is very international and is referred to as the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”, was unable to convene as scheduled on 14 March in Berne. Out of consideration for the health of CSA delegates, and because it was basically no longer possible for these delegates to travel to Switzerland from around the world, the Executive Board of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) decided to cancel the CSA meeting and settle the most pressing issues by circular vote.

First on the agenda were items vital to the everyday running of the OSA, such as approving the annual financial statements, defining a budget for the current year and formally granting discharge to the Executive Board and directors. All motions were approved.

Next on the agenda were decisions regarding the CSA’s strategic focus and tasks. The CSA gave its emphatic backing to a memorial for Swiss Nazi victims (see our background article in edition 1/2020 of the “Swiss Review”). It will continue its project work on the basis of this decision. In addition, the CSA set out its priorities

for the current year. These include retaining e-voting as an option for the Swiss Abroad. The erratic nature of postal deliveries in recent months has underlined the importance of the e-voting cause. Developing a new OSA website that will serve the needs of the “Fifth Switzerland” more effectively also remains a top priority, as is making further improvements to this magazine: our reader survey is already up and running ([survey2020.foeg.ch](http://survey2020.foeg.ch)).

Another circular vote saw the CSA approve the legal basis for the direct election of CSA delegates. Under the regulations that have now been adopted, constituencies are entitled to use e-voting to elect their delegates directly. This will help to cement the political legitimacy of elected delegates and the CSA as a whole. (ASO)

## Postal delivery of “Swiss Review” severely hampered

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on postal services, resulting in severe restrictions on mail deliveries between Switzerland and many other countries. Inter-continental postal services, such as those that connect the countries of southern Africa, have been particularly hard hit. Consequently, readers in many parts of the world received the April print edition extremely late or not at all. Some readers are also likely to experience problems receiving this, our latest July edition. We in the “Swiss Review” editorial team, as well as our publisher, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, deeply regret this and

hope postal services around the world return to normal for the remainder of 2020. Readers who are overseas and/or in countries with generally unreliable postal services are advised to switch to an online subscription, which is also free of charge. (MUL)

**If you wish to receive the online version instead of the printed edition, you can notify your Swiss representation directly. An even easier way to switch formats is to specify your preference on the FDFA website:**  
[www.eda.admin.ch/swissabroad](http://www.eda.admin.ch/swissabroad)



## Congress in Lugano postponed until 2021

Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the Congress of the Swiss Abroad will not be taking place this August in Lugano. Continued global uncertainty, severe limitations on travel, and restrictions on large gatherings in Switzerland have thwarted plans to hold this extremely internationally oriented event as scheduled. The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) has therefore decided to postpone the Congress of the Swiss Abroad until 20–22 August 2021. The congress venue (Palazzo dei Congressi in Lugano, canton of Ticino) and theme (“What are the challenges facing our democracy?”) remain unchanged.

(JF)

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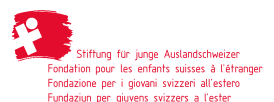


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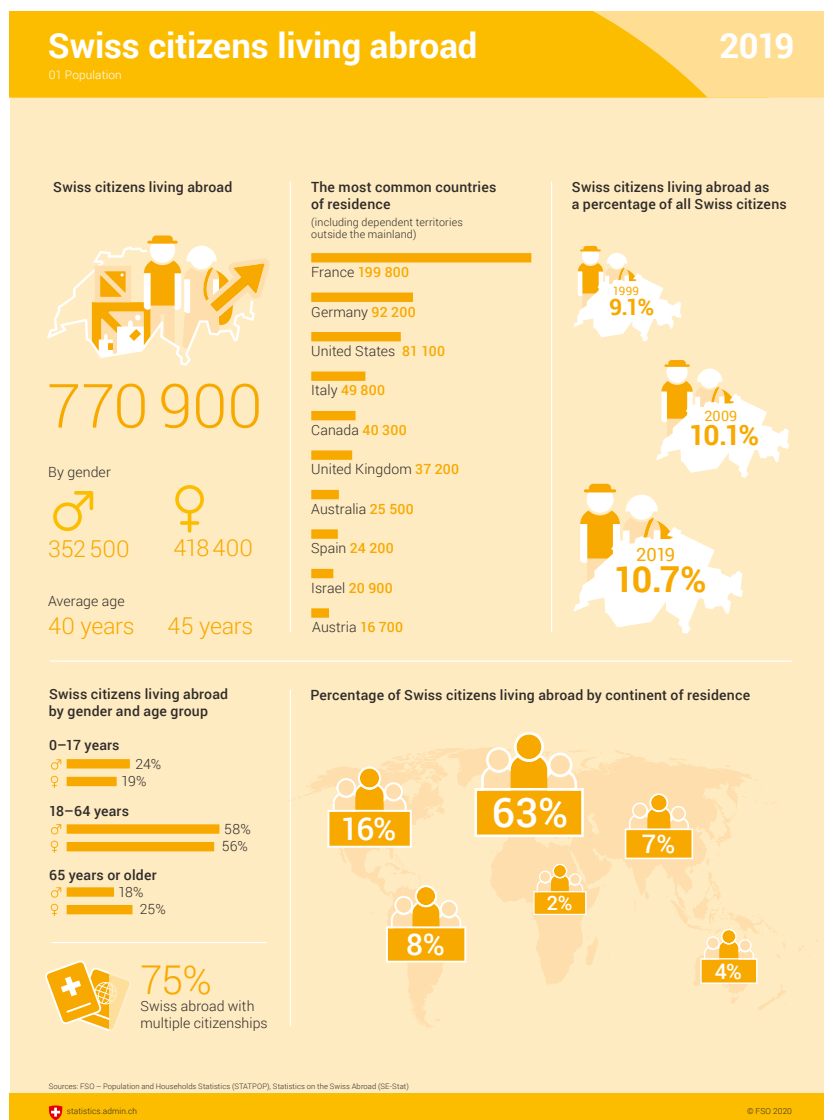


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## The “Fifth Switzerland” continues to grow

The number of Swiss living abroad increased again in 2019, accounting for a population of 770,900 by the end of the year – up by around 1.4 per cent. According to the statistics on the Swiss Abroad compiled by the Federal Statistical Office, most Swiss Abroad continue to live in Europe, namely 484,300 (or 63 per cent). The most popular European country of residence is France (199,800), followed by Germany (92,200), Italy (49,800), the UK (35,200) and Spain (24,200). However, the EU country with the highest Swiss expatriate growth rate in 2019 was Portugal (+11.6 per cent). Some 286,000 Swiss Abroad live outside Europe – in North America, Latin America and the Caribbean (24 per cent), in Asia (7 per cent), in Australia and Oceania (4 per cent), and in Africa (2 per cent).  
Further information: [ogy.de/statistics/2019](https://www.fso.admin.ch/statistics/2019)



## Federal votes

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

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

On 18 March 2020, the Federal Council decided to postpone the federal popular vote scheduled for 17 May 2020. The COVID-19 epidemic and associated containment measures would have compromised the smooth running of the vote and the unrestricted formation of opinion, thereby putting in question the integrity of the exercise.

The Federal Council has decided that there will be five federal proposals submitted to the vote on 27 September 2020:

- Federal Popular Initiative “For moderate immigration (Limitation Initiative)”;
- Amendment of the Federal Act on Hunting and the Protection of Wild Mammals and Birds (Hunting Act, HuntA);
- Amendment of the Federal Act on Direct Federal Taxation (DFTA) (Recognition of third-party childcare costs for tax purposes);
- Amendment of 27 September 2019 to the Federal Act on Compensation for Loss of Earnings for Persons on Military Service or Maternity Leave (indirect counter-proposal to the popular initiative “For sensible paternity leave – that benefits the entire family”);
- Federal Decree of 20 December 2019 on the Procurement of New Fighter Aircraft.

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in German at [www.bk.admin.ch](http://www.bk.admin.ch) > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen

The suspension of deadlines in relation to federal votes was not extended, with the collection of signatures consequently permissible again from 1 June 2020.

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Online Registration when travelling abroad

# The biggest repatriation operation in Swiss history

The COVID-19 pandemic plunged the world into a crisis like no other. Many Swiss nationals abroad were also severely affected. How did the FDFA help these people at the height of the crisis?

JOHANNES MATYASSY\*

Since becoming director of the Consular Directorate of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) around two years ago, I have already overseen numerous challenging cases in which we were able to assist Swiss nationals in difficulty abroad. Nevertheless, the crisis management measures that we initiated in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic were on a scale that even the FDFA would scarcely have imagined not so long ago. But how exactly did we assist those who needed our help? And what could the 'new normal' possibly look like after the hoped-for end of the pandemic?

## How it started

Once the Federal Council declared an 'extraordinary situation' on 16 March 2020 in light of the rapid spread of COVID-19, the FDFA focused its attention on crisis management at all levels. However, the coronavirus had already been preoccupying the FDFA and Swiss representations in China on a daily basis for some time. From the end of 2019, an increasing number of inquiries came in from worried citizens via the FDFA helpline. The pandemic then started to overshadow everything else from the beginning of March 2020, forcing us into overdrive.

## Into the public consciousness

The ensuing crisis saw a change in public attitude towards the citizen-oriented services that have traditionally been a key component of

Swiss foreign policy. The media and wider public normally take little notice of these services, but things were much different this time. On the one hand, the provision of assistance to our fellow compatriots has long been a widely debated and, at times, emotive issue. On the other, many thousands of Swiss nationals abroad finally gained direct first-hand experience of what 'citizen-oriented services' mean in the context of Swiss foreign policy. People also discovered that the FDFA would not have been able to offer its services in many instances had it not been for its wide global network of representations abroad. It was this broad network that allowed the FDFA to tailor its response to local conditions and provide uncomplicated and effective assistance without ignoring the quintessentially Swiss virtue of personal responsibility.

## Stranded abroad

The action taken by the FDFA during the coronavirus crisis benefited two different contingents of Swiss nationals. Firstly, people who had travelled abroad and wanted to return to Switzerland needed our support. But then we also had Swiss living abroad who had got into difficulty and were no longer able to do anything about it.

Therefore, we initially wanted to help stranded tourists return home. At the beginning of the crisis, it was more or less still possible for people to return to Switzerland independently on commercial flights. Swiss representations were on hand to inform and assist tourists where necessary.



**Johannes Matyassy:** "Many people finally gained experience of what 'citizen-oriented services' mean in the context of Swiss foreign policy."

Photo donated

## Thirty-five FDFA-organised flights

However, the deteriorating situation prevented others from getting back from many parts of the world under their own steam. The FDFA consequently launched a repatriation operation. From the outset, we could not have predicted that this would be the largest airlift of its kind in Swiss history. The federal government organised 35 flights in total, repatriating about 4,200 Swiss in the process. The campaign was remarkable not only for its size, but also for its success in extremely challenging circumstances. Staff at many Swiss representations had to work day and night to obtain the necessary landing rights and ensure that stranded citizens made it to the departure lounge in the first place.

**Consular assistance for Swiss returning home; Bangkok Airport, Thailand.**

Photo: FDFA

## Support continues

Now the focus is on assisting those who, until now, have been unable or





unwilling to return. Our intention is to provide them with the best possible protection on the ground. Demand for welfare aid and other consular services has increased – unsurprising given that, one, over 770,000 Swiss live abroad and, two, the Swiss normally take over 16 million trips abroad every year. Some of the reasons for this additional demand include inadequate healthcare, inadequate social welfare systems, and volatile security situations in the country of residence.

### Dual nationals – victims of their status

Certain nations have prohibited their citizens from travelling abroad during the pandemic. In some countries, this has resulted in dual nationals being unable to return home. This additional issue has posed quite a challenge in terms of providing consular protection.

### Glimpse of the future

The crisis hit and continues to hit Switzerland just as hard as the rest of the world. We have never experienced anything of this enormity. Tried-and-tested contingency plans only go so far in times like these. Despite the alarming nature of what

**Swiss passengers boarding a flight from Lima to Zurich. Switzerland organised 35 repatriation flights in total.**

Photo: FDFA

was unfolding, the FDFA managed to respond quickly in the interests of Switzerland and its citizens, thanks not least to modern technology and new communication methods – elements of the ‘virtual digital diplomacy’ that is steadily gaining traction and will doubtless play a key role in the FDFA’s future work.


### Broad network

Looking ahead, the FDFA will carefully examine how digitalisation,

current working practices, changes in international mobility, and other factors are shaping tomorrow’s world – and how consular services need to be developed accordingly. What we already know is that our broad network of Swiss representations more than proved its worth. We must safeguard this infrastructure.

Ambassador Johannes Matyassy is the director of the Consular Directorate (CD) at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA)

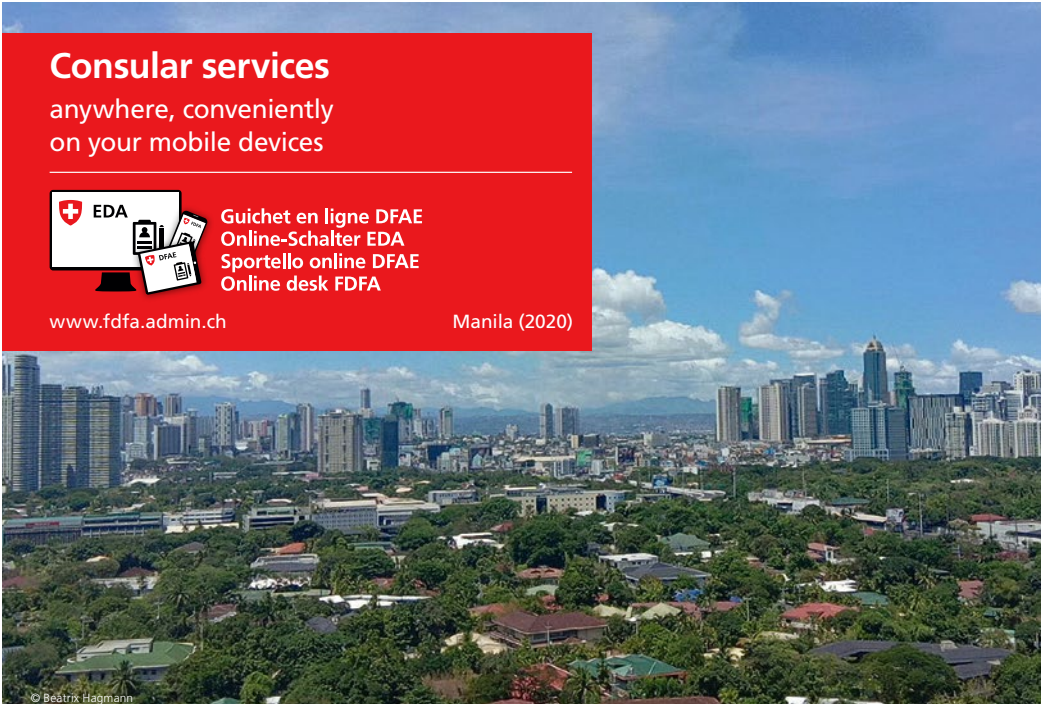
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Manila (2020)



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## Hunkeler in the wild



HANSJÖRG SCHNEIDER:  
 "Hunkeler in the wild"  
 Diogenes Verlag, Zurich 2019  
 224 pages; CHF 30 or approx.  
 EUR 22  
 Also available as an e-book

"Hunkeler took a sip from his cup, satisfied with himself and the world." Retired policeman Hunkeler is enjoying a beautiful summer's day in his favourite park cafe in Basel. Suddenly an elderly lady comes rushing in, calling for the police. Out of breath, she tells the Turkish cafe owner that a man is lying dead by the park wall.

Hunkeler recognises the deceased immediately. He was a retired journalist who used to write scathing literary and theatre reviews. Hunkeler spots two pétanque balls situated between the man's legs. The third ball is nowhere to be seen. Was it the murder weapon? Hunkeler, who has no inclination whatsoever to get involved, returns home to his house in Alsace. Yet the episode continues to play on his mind, so he starts to make inquiries.

In this thriller, Hansjörg Schneider introduces us to the world of former Detective Inspector Hunkeler. However, Schneider's book is more than just a murder mystery. This is because the author cares little for the conventional whodunnit. Instead he is more interested in Hunkeler, the man and his mind. The story takes us through the broiling streets of summer-time Basel and, in particular, into the seemingly untouched countryside of melancholy-tinged Alsace. It soon becomes clear that there is something more sinister to the natural idyll than meets the eye.

Schneider gives a thrilling account of Hunkeler's excursions into the landscape and forests of Alsace. The scene featuring an intimidating wild dog is particularly expressive. It symbolises the uncontrollable wildness that has infiltrated the cultured environs of Basel since the murder. The author portrays Hunkeler as an obstinate, unruly yet down-to-earth character who follows his own intuition. Pithy dialogue lends vibrancy and a lovely effortlessness to the storyline despite the brutal circumstances.

This is Schneider's tenth Hunkeler murder mystery. Each volume in the Hunkeler series is a complete story and can be read independently of the other books.

Hansjörg Schneider was born in Aarau in 1938. His plays – around 25 of them – have been performed in many theatres. The Hunkeler murder mysteries introduced Schneider to a wide audience, repeatedly topping the Swiss bestseller list. Six of them were made into television films starring prominent Swiss actor Mathias Gnädinger (who died in 2015).

RUTH VON GUNTEN

## Old-school hip-hop



CHLYKLASS:  
 "Deitinge Nord".  
 Chlyklass Records, 2020

Swiss-German rap ceased being a novelty a long time ago. Be that as it may, it feels strange that the Swiss-German pioneers of yesteryear are now forty-something dads – so seemingly ingrained is this musical genre in youth culture.

The men from Berne rap collective Chlyklass belong to the mature generation. The group's individual members had already made a name for themselves at the time of their first album together. "Ke Summer" (No summer) was released in 2005, after which the rappers went their separate ways. It took ten years for Chlyklass to make their follow-up record "Wis immer mir?" (Why always us?).

The crew have now teamed up again, comprising rap formations Wurzel 5 and PVP as well as solo artists Greis, Serej, Baze and Diens. Their third album "Deitinge Nord" – named after the Deitingen Nord motorway service station – is proof first and foremost that age is no barrier to producing rap music of the highest quality. The rhymes still flow, the rhythms are spartan. Chlyklass remain faithful to their roots, showcasing old-school rap at its best. These guys have been around the block and back – and it shows with each accomplished beat. Many of the lyrics also attest to the band's maturity. Chlyklass know they are no spring chickens anymore. They look back and compare what the rap scene used to be like to what it is now. Their conclusion? "We're doing the same good shit as before!" Keeping it real is one of the most important virtues in rap.

Chlyklass naturally do like to brag, but this is part and parcel of the hip-hop persona. They also rap about some of life's more mundane matters. In "Nid ües Revier" (Not our territory), they tell the story of a father who projects his desire for freedom onto his dog. He sends the dog away and imagines his canine friend surviving in the wild as a wolf.

The 11 members of Chlyklass have adapted their narrative to the more grown-up world that they now inhabit. "Deitinge Nord" is a witty, direct, intelligent and timeless album that proves how old-school Swiss-German hip-hop can age gracefully without losing its relevance. These particular forty-somethings have never been more alive and kicking. Nor, in their best moments, have they ever sounded more polished.

MARKO LEHTINEN

## Daniel Koch



Every crisis has its defining characters. Switzerland's was Daniel Koch. Hardly anyone had heard of him before COVID-19. Koch came from the upper echelons of the Federal Office of Public Health, where he had been heading the Communicable Diseases Division for years. Yet during the epidemic he acted as the country's point of reference almost on a daily basis. Tens of thousands followed the government press conferences on television and YouTube at which the bald-headed physician was constantly present. Whenever it was his turn to speak, Koch would explain the facts coolly and calmly. He would articulate complex epidemiological information in a straightforward way and respond patiently to questions from worked-up journalists with a spark of dry humour now and again. His careful, deliberate tone and unassuming manner won over the nation. Koch allayed our fears. He was someone to trust, even something of a cult figure. Through the media, we learned that he used to work as a doctor in war zones, and that he likes to go cross-country running with his two dogs (Switzerland has now heard of canicross). The public forgave Koch on the few occasions he got things wrong. The way he dismissed the effectiveness of face masks bordered on stubbornness, yet the freedom-loving Swiss lapped it up. At the end of May, with the country over the worst, 'Mr Coronavirus' disappeared into retirement – one month later than planned. His political boss, Health Minister Alain Berset, offered warm words on his farewell. Instead of trolling or taunting, people went on social media to thank the 65-year-old civil servant for his efforts. A book about Koch is already in the making, due to be published in late summer.

SUSANNE WENGER

### Sommaruga renews call for action on climate change

The President of the Swiss Confederation, Simonetta Sommaruga, said in June that climate protection and nature conservation need to “return to the very top” of the political agenda. We should not forget the climate crisis because of COVID-19, she said. It's essential that we “make the right calls now” – not only for our sake but, more importantly, for the sake of future generations. (MUL)

### Parliament votes in favour of a climate tax on airline tickets

Flying is about to get more expensive after parliament voted in June to introduce a tax on airline tickets. Tickets will be 30 to 120 francs dearer depending on class and distance of travel. This is a green incentive tax: non-flyers will benefit, because more than half of the revenue from the new levy will be redistributed to the public. A new climate fund will also be created. Parliament had been firmly opposed to an airline ticket tax before the elections in autumn 2019; the June decision is symptomatic of a change in the political climate. (MUL)

### Possible boost for PostFinance from the Federal Council

PostFinance is one of Switzerland's most important financial providers. However, the fully state-owned company is not permitted to issue loans. This is making it increasingly hard for PostFinance to generate profits. The Federal Council now want PostFinance to be part-privatised and allowed access to the credit and mortgage market, subject to certain restrictions. No final decision has been taken. Political parties and all the relevant stakeholders have until September 2020 to comment on the government's proposal. (MUL)

### “Marriage for all” bill clears important political hurdle

Same-sex couples in Switzerland should be able to marry, the National Council has decided. Around seven years since the proposal relating to same-sex marriage was brought to parliament, the house's decision in June turned out to be surprisingly clear-cut. The National Council also voted to approve controversial sperm donations for lesbian couples, thus adopting a more socially liberal stance than before the 2019 elections. (MUL)

### Who left the gold in the train?

Were you in Switzerland in October 2019 by any chance? If so, did you accidentally leave a package full of gold bars on a train travelling between St. Gallen and Lucerne? For the Lucerne police, the question of who owns the gold, worth around 180,000 francs, has been a mystery for months. The rightful owner has not yet been found, which is why the authorities have now made a public appeal. (MUL)

# We need a change of scenery.

Alpage Nava, Valais, © Christof Schürpf

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