

SWISS REVIEW

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad
August 2021



**What do Johanna and many of her peers want?
The right to vote at the age of 16**

**The Federal Council abandons talks with the EU –
a turning point that raises many questions**

**High-wire act – Uri is the canton with
the highest density of cable cars**



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Turning point with an unclear outcome

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“Berne slams the door shut.” This is how the normally rather staid “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” described the Swiss government’s unilateral decision at the end of May to abandon negotiations with the European Union (EU) – after seven years of discussions on a framework agreement that was meant to provide a sound basis for relations between non-EU Switzerland and the EU. A framework agreement that the Federal

Council has now consigned to the wastepaper basket. Slamming doors can make people jump. They ask themselves what is going on. But it was not just the bang that was startling. The decision is also unusual, out of character, and troublesome for a country like Switzerland.

It is unusual, because Swiss politics has always been about consensus building. Throwing in the towel after years of marathon negotiations is not what you expect from the Swiss government. It is a drastic step to take, given the uncertainty that it creates.

It is out of character, because as a small country Switzerland prides itself on dialogue. The Swiss government can often be counted on to engage in diplomacy and dialogue when other European countries are looking for an argument or threatening sanctions.

Finally, it is troublesome that the position of the Federal Council altered radically over the years despite the contents of the treaty remaining the same during this time. The finishing line seemed to be in sight as recently as 2019. Apparently, all the government needed to do was to “clarify” four points. But fast forward to 26 May 2021, and, lo and behold, the same government says there are “insurmountable differences” with regard to the exact same draft. Has the Federal Council been sleepwalking?

The decision represents a turning point. It creates uncertainty for well over 400,000 Swiss who live in the EU. How it will affect their lives and livelihoods remains to be seen, but it will likely make these more complicated rather than easier.

How political are the young people who cannot yet vote but will one day be able to pass verdict on current events themselves? We interviewed sixteen 16-year-olds, asking them for their views. Their responses are more pertinent than you may think, given that several cantons in Switzerland are considering lowering the voting age to 16. The latest edition of “Swiss Review” focuses on this younger demographic who have the future in their hands.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cover photo: Sixteen-year-old Johanna from Brugg (canton of Aargau) photographed by Kaspar Ruoff

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Swiss multilingualism is on the rise



It pleases me to read that Switzerland is becoming more multilingual. Understanding and speaking other languages enhances one's quality of life. Every language you learn is like an extra room in the house, offering a different

angle and outlook on the world. I read material in German, English, Russian and French on a daily basis, thanks to the internet.

WALTER ZWEIFEL, WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

You can talk about Switzerland and its four languages, but it's a shame that German isn't on the school curriculum from a young age in French-speaking Switzerland. I live in Norway, and my two children speak French with me and Finnish with their mother. Norwegian and English are taught from kindergarten.

JEAN-CLAUDE BURRI, NORWAY

I am extremely grateful about being able to switch easily between four languages – Italian, French, German and English! It has definitely widened my horizons. I don't understand Swiss-German (sorry!) and would prefer it if standard German were spoken more often on television and radio at least.

MARIA LUISA KUPKA, MUNICH, GERMANY

I have lived in Copenhagen for over 50 years, I am married to an Englishman, and we mainly speak English and Danish at home. But I have not forgotten my Bernese German. And French remains my second native tongue, which I still use at the Alliance Française in Copenhagen. We Swiss are very fortunate to be able to use all the languages we have.

MARGRITH MOODY-ZUMSTEIN, DENMARK

When people ask which Swiss language I talk, I always say the fifth language, English. So thanks for the validation! After 33 years in the U.S. I confuse myself with what is South African, British or American English. We all understand all the dialects.

ERIKA WHITE, USA

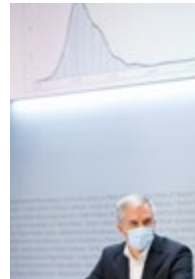
Learning a language means you can relate to the mentality and way of thinking of the people who speak it, and that is always good on a human level...

ELISABETH HOFFMANN, FRANCE

Many Swiss write in excellent German, but unfortunately few can articulate themselves fluently and correctly when they open their mouths. That's not good! We should talk in standard German to people with other languages – even if these people understand a bit of Swiss German. Should the Italian, French and Romansh speakers in German-speaking Switzerland really have to cope with all the dialects? When we travel to Italy, we expect the Italians to speak to us in proper Italian, not in some indecipherable patois.

MENA CEBOLLA-HUONDER, MALAGA, SPAIN

Why Swiss politicians considered silencing the scientists on Covid



Reading this article made me feel very uneasy. Any political decision in a democracy needs to be made transparently. For a start, the unfortunate practice of consulting behind closed doors is anything but democratic, in my view. Don't politicians have the guts to come out and explain their decisions? If they can't be open, why should they tell us what to do? This attempt to muzzle the scientists is a case in point.

ANDREAS MÜLLER, ELLWANGEN, GERMANY

ANDREAS MÜLLER, ELLWANGEN, GERMANY

It seems basic common sense to me to listen to the scientists, especially about a problem of the scale we are currently experiencing. Politics, by definition, is about serving the people and that's how it needs to stay. That means politicians should always give due consideration to the scientific perspective regarding an issue outside their field of influence.

RALF UDO KREBS, PASTO, COLOMBIA

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Old enough to vote at 16?

Young Swiss are clamouring for the voting age to be lowered from 18 to 16. A number of cantons are debating the matter, as are the politicians in Berne. Is this a watershed moment?

JÜRIG STEINER

Michael Pesaballe remembers 6 May 2007 very well. The Glarus Landsgemeinde (open-air assembly) was taking place under a torrential downpour. Pesaballe, then aged 20 and a member of the Young Socialists, walked up to the microphone on the podium and started to speak. His motion? To lower the voting age to 16. “Honestly, I did not expect to win a majority,” he recounts. But the debate in the ring below became quite heated. “I suddenly realised there was something in the air.”

It was a moment for the history books. According to Pesaballe, the then cantonal government member Marianne Dürst gave a “stirring endorsement”, after which the open-air assembly narrowly approved the young man’s compromise motion. The age at which people were entitled to stand for election to political office was left at 18. However, Glarus became the first-ever Swiss canton to lower the voting age to 16. “Naturally, I hoped other cantons would follow suit,” says Pesaballe. Yet nothing happened. In 2021, Glarus remains the only canton in which 16-year-olds can vote.

Motion approved at federal level

Pesaballe firmly believes he owed the narrow victory in 2007 both to the innovative spirit in his home canton and to the gut reaction of the crowd that day. He himself says that he would vote in favour of the motion with the same conviction now as he did back then. For example, the climate movement shows that young

people, contrary to what many people might think, are interested and getting involved in political debate, he points out. In his opinion, young people should be entitled to have their own say and learn to take responsibility, given that they are the ones who will have to live with the legacy of the votes.

In the last two to three years, there has been movement on the issue in the cantons of Vaud, Basel-Stadt, Geneva, Valais, Neuchâtel, Zurich, Berne, Uri, Zug and Lucerne. Developments at national level have been particularly noteworthy. In 2008 and 2017, voting at age 16 had no chance in parliament. Yet this changed in 2020, when the National Council surprisingly approved a motion from the Green National Councillor for Basel-Stadt, Sibel Arslan, with the preliminary consultation committee of the Council of States subsequently endorsing the motion a few months later. This now paves the way towards the drafting of a constitutional amendment that would give voting rights to around 130,000 teenagers – including young Swiss Abroad.

But before crossing the finishing line, the proposal would have to survive a popular vote at the polls – which is where it has always foundered until now. The canton of Neuchâtel rejected it last year, with 60 per cent of the electorate voting no.

Zurich in favour, Berne against

Switzerland gave women the vote in 1971 after a long struggle. In 1991, it lowered the voting age from 20 to 18.



The Glarus open-air assembly is an ancient form of direct democracy. On a rainy 6 May 2007, the assembly turned progressive by deciding to give 16-year-olds the vote.

Photo: Keystone

Foreign nationals only have the right to vote at local level in a small number of municipalities and cantons, while 16-year-olds can only vote at municipal and cantonal level in Glarus. Switzerland is always prepared to reassess who is entitled to participate in democracy, but the process always takes a long time.

In terms of lowering the voting age to 16, it is helpful to cast a glance at Switzerland’s two most populous cantons, Berne and Zurich. Zurich’s government is in favour, Berne’s is against. Both for quite different reasons.

In Zurich’s view, the “generational balance” in Swiss politics is out of kilter. The median age of voters is currently 57. According to calculations by the liberal think tank Avenir Suisse, it will rise to well over 60 by 2035. In other words, the influence of the over-60s at the polls is becoming ever greater due to higher life expectancy and will soon be the same as that of the under-60s.

Zurich’s cantonal government believes that the median age needs to be lower – and that this justifies revitalising the voting pool with



the introduction of a younger demographic. If 16- and 17-year-olds are given a say on political matters immediately after they have finished compulsory schooling, while everything that they have learned in class is still fresh in their minds, the idea is that in the long term this will increase the likelihood of them getting into the habit of voting.

The ability to make reasoned decisions

The Berne cantonal government, on the other hand, points to the discrepancy that would arise between the ages from which young people could exercise civil and political rights. In Switzerland, you must be at least 18 years old to sign legal papers. If the voting age was 16, it would mean that you would not be allowed to sign petitions for referendums and popular initiatives – but you could vote on them. There would also be a disconnect between the right to vote in elections and the right to stand for election: you could do the former now but would have to wait for two years to do the latter.

Such an argument is a red herring that prevents us from creating a sys-

tem that is truly geared to young people, says 20-year-old Philippe Kramer from the politically unaffiliated pressure group *Stimmrechtsalter 16* (Voting Age at 16). In his view, playing one thing off against the other like that misses the point. What matters, he says, is the ability to make reasoned decisions, i.e. to know what you are voting for or against. “You can certainly do that when you are 16.” According to psychologists, our ability to think coolly and calmly without time pressure or influence from friends is fully developed by the time we are 16, he notes.

Harnessing Instagram

But where do young people get the information they need to vote? According to a survey, 70 per cent of

Teenagers react with delight at the Glarus open-air assembly on 6 May 2007, after the electorate decides to lower the cantonal voting age to 16.

Photo: Keystone

Thanks to the efforts of National Councillor Sibel Arslan (canton of Basel-Stadt), the campaign to lower the voting age to 16 is up and running at federal level.

Photo: Keystone



15- to 25-year-olds consume political news no more than once a week. However, a number of initiatives are trying to correct this. For several years, the Easyvote programme has been producing brochures and video clips that provide easy-to-understand information on elections and popular votes. And a few months ago, a collective of young journalists went online with @tauch.station – a social media project that researches political issues and explains them to young people on the popular, easily digestible photo- and video-sharing platform Instagram. It is not that young people have no interest in politics per se: “But we believe democracy should also be about accessibility,” says Alice Grosjean, 29, one of the co-founders of @tauch.station. The online world in which young people often spend their time is particularly bereft of political coverage, she adds. Or its political content is too complicated. @tauch.station aims to rectify this.

One could argue that the young demographic is ready for the voting age to be lowered to 16. Adult voters still need time to get used to the idea.

Sweet sixteen

What matters to the 16-year-olds of today? What are their biggest hopes and fears? What do they think about lowering the voting age to 16? We asked sixteen 16-year-olds to tell us – and learned that theirs is a generation acutely aware that political decisions will shape their future.



Anne Hielscher

Born in 2004 and living in Mollis (canton of Glarus), where she can now vote in elections and popular votes at the age of 16. Anne is a pupil at the cantonal school in Glarus. Her main subject is biochemistry.

“Quite a few of the young people I know are anxious about the future. It’s normal to think things over a lot at our age, but climate change and Covid-19 are difficult to process. We don’t know how the situation will pan out – or, for example, which jobs are still safe to go into. The pandemic has taken a year out of our lives. It’s a sobering experience. Mental health issues are on the rise. I am very concerned about climate change.

Politicians finally need to realise that something has to be done. They should stop talking and start acting. We don’t have much time left. I try and do as much as possible in everyday life to help our climate – like being a vegetarian and using public transport. I don’t like when people dress opinions up as facts to make a point. I am interested in science and have chosen biochemistry as my main subject.

One day, I can imagine doing research and then working as a teacher. I am currently doing an ornithology course in my free time. I like being in nature, going on excursions, and I jog regularly. However, I don’t have much time for hobbies outside school. I think it is good that young people can vote from the age of 16 in the canton of Glarus. Unfortunately, the pandemic has so far prevented me from doing so. The open-air assembly has been cancelled twice. I will certainly take part in the next one. I have the vote, so I want to use it.

Society will benefit as a whole from the fresh outlook and perspectives that young people can bring. Our priorities are different to those of older voters. They should also lower the voting age to 16 at national level. Young people who want to vote should be entitled to do so. After all, it is our future at stake. We are the ones who will have to live with what the electorate decides now. I watch the evening news, read newspapers

and chat with my parents to keep track of the latest developments. I am interested in politics but would feel uneasy belonging to a political party. I don’t agree entirely with any of the parties and would find it hard to defend a position that I don’t share.

INTERVIEW BY EVELINE RUTZ



“Outside school, I mainly go to Scouts at the weekend. Other than that, I often go skateboarding. The skatepark in Aarau is not perfect, but it will do. For me, a good skatepark has to have enough space, so that beginners can also skate alongside people who want to practise the more advanced tricks. And there also needs to be enough shade from the sun. Skateboarding flat out is physically quite exhausting.

You can only become a better skateboarder if you are willing to practise, practise and practise again. There is always the risk of getting injured – usually on the ankles and knees. But

“ I would like to become a member of parliament in the National Council. Bringing about real change is a prospect that excites me. For example, I want our economic system to be more liberal and climate-friendly. When in doubt, I always choose the most efficient option: I travel to school by bus, although the journey takes twice as long as riding there on my bike. But I can read the newspaper on the way.

You certainly need a bit of luck to be elected to parliament, but I am a keen, effective, quick-witted debater – which is not a bad thing to be. I have sat in the youth parliament of the city of Berne for over two years, where we have been calling for the voting age to be lowered to 16. The matter is currently with Berne’s cantonal parliament.

When I have finished school, I want to tour through Japan on foot with a friend. I am fascinated that a country so far away can, from what I read, be so similar to us in terms of its culture. Both the Swiss and the Japanese tend to be a bit reserved, but friendly once you get to know them. At the moment, I am learning Japanese with the help of online videos. And saving money for the trip. I don’t have a lot of money yet, because I don’t have a job. There simply isn’t enough time for everything.

INTERVIEW BY FLAVIA VON GUNTEN



Jason Steinmann

Born in 2005, living in Ittigen near Berne, and a pupil at Neufeld upper secondary school in Berne. Jason takes part in his school’s theatre productions because he enjoys acting out new parts.



Moritz Würtenberg

Born in 2005, living in Küttigen (canton of Aargau), and a pupil at lower secondary school in Aarau. This summer, Moritz will begin a three-year apprenticeship as a chemical laboratory technician.

none of us have protection on – it makes you much too hot. Helmets and knee guards aren’t really our style. You need to have an instinct for these things. Some days you feel good and pull off difficult tricks. On other days, it’s better not to overdo it.

They say that young people are not interested in politics or are not ready to vote at the age of 16. But I know that my friends and I often chat about political issues. Why wouldn’t we? Maybe not about party politics, but things that affect our future such as the fight against climate change. And I have already made important personal decisions related to my apprenticeship, for example. I take

responsibility for these decisions. So why do people still think that young people like me aren’t mature enough to have their own political opinions? It doesn’t make any sense. Of course, some history teachers are better than others. But I think we do learn quite a bit at school about politics in Switzerland. More than enough to be able to vote.



INTERVIEW BY JÜRIG STEINER

“ We must give the environment better protection for the sake of future generations. Politicians need to get this message into their heads and invest more in combating climate change. My family are already doing their bit. We have no car, and a proportion of our electricity comes from the solar panels on our roof. The fact that we travel to Finland almost every summer is less environmentally friendly. We have friends whom we visit over there. My grandmother is Finnish. I learned the language from my father. By the way, Finnish has no female or male pronouns. I like that. Languages should be all-inclusive, regardless of gender. I try to use gender-neutral language whenever I speak or write in German. But doing that should be a given anyway. I have not yet made up my mind about what I want to do when I leave school. I am interested in the media. Maybe I will work as a presenter.

Switzerland’s national and cantonal elections have been part of our history lessons at school. Our teacher has always stressed how important it is to vote and how privileged we are in Switzerland to be able to do so. This has made me more interested in politics. I always ask my parents about how they are going to vote. Social media is one of the ways in which I keep track of the latest issues. I think it would be good if younger people could vote. We could then use our voice to do more against climate change. Lowering the voting age to 16 would also make us feel integrated in society. After all, Switzerland’s population is getting older. All portions of society should have a political voice. That includes people with physical or mental health issues.

I spend a lot of my free time outdoors. I regularly take our dog, Lupin, for walks. He is a toller who was born a year ago and still needs quite a bit of training. I often walk him with other girls who also have dogs. I like to read and I am interested in languages – I can imagine doing a semester abroad one day. Music plays an important role in my everyday life. I listen to various genres, play the violin, and sing in a choir. Another thing I would like to say is that schools need to do more to educate children about same-sex relationships.”

INTERVIEW BY EVELINE RUTZ



Johanna Ruoff

Born in 2005, living in Brugg (canton of Aargau), and a student at the cantonal school in Baden. Johanna enjoys reading, plays the violin, and goes on regular walks with family dog Lupin.





Kimmo Steiner

Born in 2004, living in Thun, and currently doing a boatbuilding apprenticeship in Spiez. Kimmo meets his friends at weekends to play basketball or eat out.

female footballers are better coached and paid. Whatever happens, I would like a career in sport. I enjoy being physically active. That includes being on the slopes in winter and at the outdoor swimming pool in summer. I also regularly spend time with children as a Guides leader. I enjoy that.

I am actively engaged in trying to make politicians take climate protection more seriously. I have already taken part in bike demonstrations as well as the Fridays For Future strikes. Sixteen-year-olds are capable of forming their own opinions. They are at a good age to determine what they want. I think it would be a good idea to lower the voting age to 16. I have been consuming a lot more media content to keep track during the pandemic. We also cover political issues at school. However, we need to be encouraged to think even more critically. It is important to question what the media say.

INTERVIEW BY EVELINE RUTZ

Yves Heim

Born in 2004 and living in Zurich, where she is a pupil at the Liceo Artistico – a Swiss-Italian upper secondary school devoted to the arts. Yves plays football in the junior section of FC Zurich Ladies. She is also in the Girl Guides.

“ Football is my main love. I have been playing for seven years, and I joined FC Zurich Ladies three years ago. I am now moving up from the under-17s to the under-19s. We train four times a week and play matches at the weekend. We often play our away matches in other cities, sometimes against French- or Italian-speaking teams. The level of football is high – our coach demands a lot, so I really have to give my all. That suits me fine, because that is how to improve. I am currently a defender and feel very comfortable playing at the back. We have a good team spirit. I also hang out with a few teammates in my free time. Naturally, there is competition for places in the team. You sometimes have to be selfish to play well. On the other hand, it’s a team game. You can only win together. I get annoyed when things don’t go our way. After a defeat, I prefer to go straight home and lie down.

We hardly have any contact with the boys in FC Zurich’s junior section. Their under-17s consists of three groups. The boys are under greater pressure to perform, and competition for places is fiercer. They have greater opportunity, because their budget is bigger than ours. For example, they have more training camps than we do. I think it would be great if they gave girls and boys the same level of coaching and funding.

For me, football is more than a hobby. I am thinking of going abroad one day – maybe to the USA, where



“ I couldn’t make up my mind whether to become a joiner or a multi-skilled mechanic, so I decided to do a boatbuilding apprenticeship instead. Boatbuilding combines skills from both these professions. I had never steered a boat before my apprenticeship, but I needed to pass a sailing course to complete it. I bought a boat last summer and promptly did the test.

I like the feeling of freedom that you get on Lake Thun. One day, I would like to sail around the world. I am attracted by the idea of getting to places that only a small number of people will ever see. In the long term, I would like to work as a boatbuilder during winter and as a sailing instructor during summer. It would be great if I could pass on my knowledge to others.

I am very happy with life. I have no urge to change anything. Politics is not really my thing, and being too young to vote at the moment is fine by me.

It is more important to me that my teammates hear my voice on the handball court. They have to, because I am captain of our team. The coach and I decide together what moves to practise during training. And I always have first pick when it comes to shirt numbers. The number-eight jersey is of no particular significance to me, but I like wearing it nonetheless.

INTERVIEW BY FLAVIA VON GUNTEN

Lionel Formaz

***2005, lives in Martigny (VS). He is in his first year at the Ecole de commerce (business school). He trains assiduously at Greco-Roman wrestling, as well as parkour and skateboarding.**



“ I support the movement of allowing 16-year-olds to vote in Switzerland. I feel that in 2021 young people are more mature and educated than they were in the past, and since many young people today are excited about politics, they want to be involved in the decision making process. For me it would be important to look at details of both sides when forming an opinion, and to make an informed decision before voting. Whether it is 16- or 18-year-olds who vote, I think that everyone needs to consider supporting and opposing views and opinions, and not just vote for what your parents or friends like, so that you make an independent and informed vote.

It's true that young people are in school and therefore don't pay the taxes that support decisions that are made, however the decisions that are made do affect the lives of young Swiss citizens, and will for a long time to come. Some older people may think that young Swiss youth will only vote for short-term interests, however many young people today are interested in long-term issues

such as global warming, world hunger and world peace. Similar to how young people choose their educational path, being allowed to vote will help Swiss youth to play an active role in their political future as well.

Making a change and getting people involved can be difficult, however it is important for many different voices to be heard, and today's population is younger, so this will allow for more voices to be heard. It also makes you more invested and engaged in your country concerning the decisions that are made if you know that your vote will count.

When I am older, I might return to Switzerland to live permanently, and if I am able to vote now, I can be part of what the country will be like when I am done with school, and the Switzerland that my children will know. I consider allowing 16-year-olds the right to vote an important part of having an educated and engaged voting base added to the current voices who are heard.

INTERVIEW BY STÉPHANE HERZOG

“ Yes, I'm interested in politics! If there is a big debate in the US or in France, I watch to see who is coming out ahead. I saw parts of the debate between Le Pen and Macron on TikTok and Instagram, for example. It was a tough one. There were some good digs. We look at this idea of debate in our political economics class. In Switzerland, politics is less lively, so the president of the Confederation doesn't stand out. Regarding the right to vote, women fought to obtain it and in certain countries they still don't have it. So it is an important right.

But as for the right to vote at 16, I'm not sure it's the best idea, as not everyone is necessarily ready. One solution



Juliette Siffer

***2005, lives in New York with her Swiss/American family. She attends high school and enjoys being politically involved, having philosophical discussions, and discovering new ideas.**



would perhaps be to first give the right to vote at a communal level. For referendums and national elections, I think we would need more in-depth information. At the level of local politics, I think the commune should listen more to the views of young people.

The opening of a skatepark in Martigny recently is a good thing. But it took 15 years to happen! During Covid-19, if it was raining, there was nowhere to go to meet up with your friends. We need to create spaces for young people.

My future? I'd like to have a house and a family in Martigny. I have another dream, more short-term: I'd like to

go to Japan with my friends to discover the culture as I'm a fan of Manga and Japanese cartoons. Regarding the big questions of the future, there is of course global warming. I make small efforts at my own level: I recycle my waste, I don't waste electricity. But for me, we are missing real joint action. In any case, we need to stop using nuclear energy, to avoid polluting the ground for life, and we need to find clean energies instead. Would I become involved in politics? I don't campaign for anything at the moment, but why not, one day!

INTERVIEW BY STÉPHANE HERZOG



Cléo Perret

*2005, is in her first year of high school in Geneva, in a class with a music option. She plays classical piano and dances.

“ Voting at 16? Yes, I'd do that. But you need to be able to look at the wider picture, and not all young people have a clear enough vision of the world for that. That said, there are a lot of votes held on subjects which concern young people more than the old. For the climate, having the right to vote at 16 would be useful. The same for pesticides. This theme was really prominent on social media. We would have had enough information to vote. The disadvantage would perhaps be that it pushes young people to grow up into the adult world too quickly.

Swiss politics? I don't understand a lot of it. It's a huge muddle for such a little country, with the three levels of political decisions. Out of the leaders, I know the name of Alain Berset, who has been very much to the fore in recent months. I've also heard a lot about the Maudet affair at home, but I didn't really understand the implications and I haven't read anything neutral about it. So I don't have an opinion on that topic. I don't look at the media a lot, apart from the articles that we read at school to learn how to debate. We did this on the topic of purchasing fighter planes, for example. I use Instagram a lot; I follow content creators.

My hopes for the world? First of all, I'd like the virus to stop! Then there is the question of global warming. The need to act is urgent, but it's not too late. I marched for that. The authorities need to organise the energy transition. My personal dreams are focused on classical music, which I've been learning to play since I was little. Learning an instrument is the preserve of a certain social class. I would like more disadvantaged people to be able to have this opportunity as well. Music will be a part of my life as an adult. I'll live in town and I'll have children. Those are the things I want most. As for my fears, I worry about the climate getting out of balance. That's frightening. Artificial intelligence also perhaps represents a danger to human employment. We live in a time where job security is no longer guaranteed.

INTERVIEW BY STÉPHANE HERZOG



“ I lead a full life. It is hard to make a short list of all the things I do. I dance hip-hop and jazz three evenings a week. I enjoy dancing with other people and forgetting my everyday worries. I also play the piano, draw people and animals in my sketchbook, and use my sewing machine to alter my clothes. My girlfriends and I often spend time along the River Aare, where we play cards or volleyball, skate, have picnics, listen to music, or just talk.



Olivia Aeschlimann

Born in 2005 and living in Berne, where she is a pupil at Kirchenfeld upper-secondary school. Olivia enjoys listening to the radio station SRF 3, because she likes its mixture of music and information.

Having so many interests is a good thing, in my view. But it can also be a hindrance, because I have no plans on what to do after I leave school. A law degree sounds interesting. Or maybe I could study medicine. Whatever I decide, I want to add my voice to the fight against inequality. For the moment, this means taking part in street demonstrations. I need to express my views in some way or other, given that I am not yet entitled to vote. I don't understand why I still have to wait two years. We have already studied politics at school, so I am well aware of how government works. At 18, I will just have a little more life experience.

INTERVIEW BY FLAVIA VON GUNTEN



Elena Niederhauser

Born in 2004, living in Tarasp in Lower Engadine (canton of Graubünden), and about to begin an apprenticeship as a chemist. Elena can well imagine going into politics.

“ When I am not at school or doing homework, I am usually out with my friends, or either reading or cooking. School is very important to me, and I am trying to get the best marks possible. I will be leaving school at the beginning of summer, after which I start an apprenticeship as a chemist. I want to get a good training and then ideally go and study – for which I will have to leave my home valley. After that, I will probably live in the city or even abroad. But I would like to return one day and live here again in the Lower Engadine.

My mother is involved in local politics. When my brother and I were younger, neither of us were interested. Now we notice how much we talk about politics at home, especially when there is a referendum around the corner. It has become quite exciting. The latest proposals – the initiative on pesticides and the initiative on clean drinking water – affected our family directly,

because my parents run a farm. We had to make a podcast about these proposals at school, when we looked at the politics in detail. I always try to form my own opinion. While I think it would be great to be allowed to vote at 16, I also think the issues would be too complex for me. There are many things I really have no clue about! When you are 16, there are more important things than exercising your democratic duty. However, I would happily change our climate policies. We could do so many things better. I can very well envisage getting involved in politics one day. I don't need to be Federal Councillor or anything like that.

INTERVIEW BY FADRINA HOFMANN



To find out more on this issue, visit www.revue.ch

What do 16-year-olds like Dewjana (GE), Lisa (TG), Malin (SO), Noelia (GL) and Valérie (SG) have to say? To read the portraits of all 16 young people interviewed, visit us online at www.revue.ch.

Switzerland's biggest aerial transport network

Mountainous Uri has more originally designed, small cable cars passing over gaping precipices than any other canton. Once a crucial link to the outside world for remote mountain farms, they now serve sustainable tourism as well.

JÜRIG STEINER

Eggenbergli is a small plateau high up on the steep, shadowed flank of the deep Schächental valley stretching from the cantonal capital Altdorf to the rocky wilderness of the Klausen pass. As regards vehicle access, only the mountain farmers with their local knowledge can reach Eggenbergli by off-road motorcycle, but there are also two 1,500-metre-long wire cables stretching from Weiler Witterschwanden up to the Klausen pass road. They are crucial as they enable a mode of transport that is both historical and innovative.

The two small cable cars, constructed in 1953 and painted green to match the woods and meadows, look like lovingly restored exhibition pieces from a vintage museum. Up to four people can fit on the two benches; the luggage is kept in an outside holding compartment. A double-sided mechanical grip, as thin as spaghetti straps, connects the cabin to the four wheels on the cable. The passengers start the cable car by inserting a token and pressing a button. When the electrically powered cabin starts to glide down the steep valley, it tilts sharply forwards, taking the passengers' breath away, albeit only briefly.

Connection to civilisation

Then the passengers glide serenely in a type of suspended 2CV, the cult two



horsepower Citroën, over open farmland: meadows often at a dizzyingly steep angle, islands of bright-green livening up the sombre mountain forest, houses scattered over the hillside and farmers applying straw blowers to the dried hay. The mountainside is inaccessible by road.

Cable cars seemingly lost in time like the one at Eggenbergli are inextricably linked to the landscape cultivated by the Uri mountain farmers. “The cantonal land improvement de-



Higher, further, faster, more beautiful? In search of the somewhat different Swiss records. Today: a visit to the region with Switzerland's densest cable car network

partment supported the construction of many small cable cars in Uri after the Second World War,” says historian Romed Aschwanden. He is head of the Kulturen der Alpen (Cultures of the Alps) institute, which is an outpost of the University of Lucerne in Altdorf and researches, inter alia, the cable car culture in Uri, including some quite original projects. For example, musicologist Michel Roth records the sounds of the swaying cables in the Schächental valley so he can make



a composition out of the archived sounds.

The historian Aschwanden, on the other hand, is more interested in the cable cars' social impact: small cable cars were as important to the mountain community in Uri as more traditional land improvement measures, such as drainage or correcting the water table in flat land. They facilitated the cultivation of agricultural land and improved its economic viability by providing a connection to civilisation. The cable car connection to outlying settlements allowed children to attend school and gave parents improved access to their second jobs in the valley.

The "Niederberger Schiffli"

The terrain in the canton of Uri is highly contorted and steep, hence its uniquely dense network of cable cars, 38 of which are still licensed for transporting people all over the canton. A ride in the small, open cabin from Bristen in the Maderanertal valley to Waldiberg or from Musenalp down to Chlital in Isenthal is as spectacular as that to Eggenbergli.

Remigi Niederberger, an industrial pioneer from Nidwalden, invested heavily in the cable car boom. He was a blacksmith who recognised the inherent potential of cable networks as a mode of transport around the turn of the century. He and his sons developed, as Aschwanden recounts, their own model designed precisely for the rugged mountain terrain: a very small cabin, reduced to the bare essentials while offering protection from the weather, with short grips compatible with low pylons. The "Niederberger Schiffli", which are still used at Eggenbergli, are now part of the rich history of cable car design.

Public transport into the heights

A small gondola goes up, via a mid-way stop, from Schächental valley to the high Ruogig plateau with its pastureland. There are small farms spread out over a wide distance from the Mittelstation (half-way up) and the Bergstation (at the top), they are connected to the main axis via smaller goods cable lifts. Milk and hay are gathered and dispatched to the valley using this method and daily necessities are dis-

The Eggenbergli "Niederberger Schiffli" looks like it belongs in a vintage museum.

Photos: Uri Tourismus

seminated to the farming families in the same way. "The Uri cable car culture is not just about the main route, but also the myriad micro connections to the far-flung settlements," says the historian Aschwanden. It is, in effect, an aerial, vertically-oriented public transport network.

The curious aspect of this system is its inability to cover costs. "The many small, low-frequency connections can't really be profitable," confirms Toni Arnold, head of the Uri cable car association. This is due in no small measure to growing security requirements. Even if the small lines look like badly maintained temporary measures at first glance, according to Arnold they undergo regular checks as prescribed by law. Every line is officially tested annually and the cable is X-rayed using a special procedure. The only accidents in the past few decades involved goods cable lifts carrying people, which is not allowed.



Passengers need to work out for themselves in the "Niederberger Schiffli" cockpit how to get it moving.

Photo: Jürg Steiner

Roads as an alternative

Arnold hopes the growth of outdoor tourism will make the small Uri cable cars more economically viable,



particularly as most of them are now equipped to carry mountain bikes. At the same time, Arnold is aware that the road network will increasingly encroach on the traditional cable car routes in the medium term. Although “the road is not better than the cable car in every way”, as Arnold notes. Nonetheless, access by road is more

convenient and less complicated. Then again, cable cars are preferable during the winter when the roads are icy. Furthermore, their limited capacity acts as a barrier against mass incursions and ensures gentle, ecological tourism, which is currently in demand. The cable cars are especially useful in winter as they can take

Left: The Amsteg–Arnisee cable car covers 790 metres in altitude. Right: Cable cars on the Hofstetten–Wilerli line are open to the elements.
Photos: Uri Tourismus

touring skiers to off-piste slopes when there is an increased avalanche risk higher up.

Farmer Martin Gisler is not a tourist; however, he is still against building a road in the area. He is in charge of operating the cable car from Witterschwanden to Eggenbergli that provides a valuable service as a public transport option. All five pylons are also stops at the press of a button. Five families live on the slope below the cable car all year round and each stop serves a house. Gisler lives at the fifth pylon. He particularly values the aerial transport during the snowy winter, when it takes the whole day just to clear the path to his house.

The local business development association recently discussed building a road to replace the old cable car, but decided against it. And not only for cost reasons. The inhabitants of Eggenbergli just cannot imagine living without a cable car.



The Schächental (Schächental valley) in the canton of Uri has a plethora of cable cars. These are marked as red lines on the map.
© Swisstopo

Preventing words from turning into deeds again

Switzerland intends to create a national memorial to the victims of the Nazis. Politicians have responded favourably to a proposal put together by a handful of organisations – a project group that also aims to combat current-day prejudice and exclusion.

SUSANNE WENGER

At the end of May, five organisations – including the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) – presented the Federal Council with a detailed plan for the creation of a memorial site in the city of Berne. They said that the purpose of the site was to remember Swiss whom the Nazi regime “persecuted, disenfranchised or murdered for being Jewish, for being political opponents, or for other reasons”. The monument would also be dedicated to those who resisted the Nazis or offered protection or help to people who were persecuted. Furthermore, it would commemorate the unfortunate men, women and children whom the Swiss authorities refused to rescue.

Some 150 initial signatories (including numerous celebrities) and 30 organisations have given their backing to the proposal. There are already a number of private commemorative plaques etc. around the country. For example,

“Stolpersteine” (stumbling stones) were laid at the end of last year. These brass square plaques affixed on top of cuboid concrete blocks – already well known in Germany and France – were installed into the pavement in front of the former homes of several Swiss victims in Zurich. “But now is the time for us to have an official monument funded by the federal government,” says OSA President Remo Gysin.

Remembering the horrors

It is important to preserve the memory of the unimaginable horrors of the Holocaust and Nazi terror in Switzerland too, not least with an eye to the younger generation, says Ralph Lewin, president of the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities. In addition to an aesthetic public memorial, the aim is to include an educational and information programme that can also be accessed online. This is because there was minimal public awareness of there being any Swiss Nazi victims until a few years ago, whereas recent research shows that around 1,000 people with Swiss connections suffered in concentration camps, of whom more than 200 were killed.

Zurich social democrat Albert Mülli (1916–1997) survived the Dachau concentration camp. He had smuggled pamphlets to Vienna in 1938. On being liberated from Dachau, Mülli was told by the Swiss authorities that he had “only himself to blame”. It all took its toll –overwhelming him as he got older, as Mülli’s daughter Ursula Zellweger recalls. “It is high time that the Swiss government ack-

Forgotten Swiss victims

In a book published at the end of 2019, three journalists from German-speaking Switzerland looked at the fate of Swiss concentration camp prisoners, of whom most were expatriates (see edition 1/2021 of “Swiss Review”). An updated version of this much-noted book is now available in French. “After the book came out, readers contacted us to give us information on previously omitted Swiss cases,” says co-author Benno Tuchschnid. The sources were compiled and verified, and the supplemented book now covers 749 Nazi victims with Swiss connections. One of the new additions is Henryka Sigmann, a Jewish woman who, along with her husband and two of her five children, was arrested in the Netherlands and deported to Auschwitz, where she was murdered in 1943. Eugène Edouard Scheuch died at Gusen concentration camp in 1945 after being arrested two years previously in France for unlawful possession of firearms.

“Les victimes oubliées du 3e Reich” (The forgotten victims of the Third Reich). By Balz Spörri, René Staubli and Benno Tuchschnid. Editions Alphil, 384 pages. CHF 29, EUR 25. Available from October 2021.



Remembering also means putting names and faces to the victims – Albert Mülli was imprisoned at Dachau concentration camp. Photo: Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv



The authors of the memorial proposal submitting their project to the Federal Council. Photo: Keystone

nowledged this,” she says. Former federal judge Vera Rottenberg, 77, also supports the memorial proposal. When she was a baby, Rottenberg and her Jewish family only narrowly escaped deportation from German-occupied Budapest in 1944. Because Vera’s mother had lost her Swiss citizenship by marrying a Hungarian, the family were initially refused repatriation. It was only thanks to the determined intervention of a diplomat that they were able to flee. “Harald

Feller was the diplomat,” says Rottenberg, adding that too little is known about him and other courageous Swiss men and women who saved people in their hour of need.

Standing up for democracy

The authors of the proposal believe it is important to make reference to the present day. “The massive increase in anti-Semitism on social media worries us,” says Lewin. Hate speech, discrimination, and racism need to be combated. Because as history shows: “Thoughts turned into words, words turned into deeds.” The memorial is intended to increase awareness of core values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Parliament supports the plan for an official Swiss remembrance site. Before the summer recess, the Council of States unanimously approved a motion to this effect from the SP politician Daniel Jositsch. Numerous members of parliament across the political spectrum signed an identical motion from Alfred Heer (SVP) in the National Council. The government is also open to the proposal. Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis (FDP) said that the Federal Council wanted to play an active part in creating a memorial. The government cannot impose the project, the impetus must come from the people – which it does in this instance, he acknowledged.



“Stolpersteine” (stumbling stones) commemorating the victims of National Socialism have now been laid in Swiss cities too. Photo: Keystone

www.swissmemorial.ch | www.stolpersteine.ch



Borders – a story of jeopardy and opportunity

If a museum is devoted ostensibly to what seems a very niche, limited subject, how does it retain its appeal for decades? Take the Bourbaki Panorama in Lucerne, for example – a museum with architecture and artifacts that hark back to a single event: the winter crossing into Switzerland of 87,000 ragged, frozen, hungry French soldiers led by com-

mander General Bourbaki in 1871. The subsequent intake, disarmament and internment of Bourbaki's demoralised refugee army played an important role in cementing humanitarianism and neutrality in Switzerland's national psyche. This story, which proved to be a remarkable experience for the entire Swiss nation, was depicted on an iconic 112-metre-long circular painting by Edouard Castres that now dominates the museum. Panoramic depictions like Castres'



still-captivating work are seen as the precursor of cinema. Instead of glorifying the suffering, the painting remains an outstanding piece of art and a blunt indictment of war. During the current year of remembrance to mark 150 years since the event, the museum not only looks back at the suffering as well as the solidarity with which Switzerland responded to this wave of refugees. It also encourages us to reflect on the borderlines and borderline experiences of the present day,

offering an inquisitive and provocative take on the world of boundaries, borders and limits – from our own human limitations, to contemporary border crossings and the modern-day refugees whose dreams these borders crush. Clearly, borders are a story of jeopardy and opportunity. The museum gets this message across not through paintings as Castres once did, but through a mixture of multicultural features, picture clues, podium discussions, and thematic guided

tours. A century and a half later, the Bourbaki Panorama pushes its own boundaries as a visitor attraction. MUL

Year of remembrance at the Bourbaki Panorama
Special exhibition accompanied by a wide range of guided
tours and events; until 31 December 2022
www.bourbakipanorama.ch

Swiss-EU relations facing an uncertain future

The framework agreement between Switzerland and the European Union is history. But the Federal Council wants to maintain the bilateral approach. A risky plan fraught with uncertainty.

THEODORA PETER

A black day, an error of judgement, or an act of liberation? It remains to be seen how historians will look back on 26 May 2021 and its implications for Swiss-EU relations. On a cool, rainy Wednesday, three stony-faced members of the Swiss government appeared before the media in Berne to announce the abandonment of talks with Brussels. President of the Swiss Confederation Guy Parmelin (SVP) – flanked by Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis (FDP) and Justice Minister Karin Keller-Sutter (FDP) – put it like this: “The talks have failed to produce the requisite results.” An unspectacular sentence with explosive implications. After seven years of arduous negotiations, Switzerland has walked out and slammed the door shut.

The framework agreement was meant to govern all aspects of the relationship between non-EU Switzerland and the EU – and it matters, not least because the EU is Switzerland’s main trading partner. What is more, the framework agreement would have replaced all the existing bilateral agreements. The draft framework agreement had been on the table since 2018, when the EU unilaterally declared the negotiations over. However, Switzerland wanted further “clarifications” on contentious points, such as wage protection and the free movement of EU citizens in Switzerland (see edition 2/2019 of “Swiss Review”). Ultimately, the two sides failed to bridge their differences. The Federal Council’s only recently appointed new negotiator in Brussels, Livia Leu, was also unable to clear these stumbling blocks. She had no alternative but to deliver the government’s rejection letter to the EU headquarters. Cue considerable annoyance in Brussels. Apparently, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen had “no time” to take a telephone call from Guy Parmelin.

Electorate not consulted

The collapse of negotiations also caused consternation in Switzerland, not least because the Federal Council had taken such a significant decision without consulting parliament or the electorate. Political commentators like historian Thomas Maissen accused the government of lacking

The last meeting between the president of the Swiss Confederation, Guy Parmelin, and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen before Berne walked away – body language and facial expressions betraying their “insurmountable differences”.

Photo: Keystone



guts in cancelling any domestic debate on the draft treaty and choosing the “path of least resistance”. Indeed, the framework agreement had been a hard sell for the Federal Council. Besides the SVP, which had flatly rejected what it called the “subjugation treaty”, the trade unions also voiced opposition. With the exception of the GLP, there was a great deal of scepticism among the other political parties. Brussels showing little willingness to compromise during the talks did little to help either.

What will happen now? The Federal Council had no real plan B up its sleeve and hopes to continue with the existing bilateral deals with the EU – despite the EU having made clear that it will not agree any new treaties with Switzerland, nor renew existing treaties, without a framework agreement in place. The Federal Council has suggested to the European



Commission that the two parties “begin political dialogue on developing a common agenda”, as Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis put it – the understanding in Berne being that the existing bilateral agreements will “continue to be applied consistently and without any difficulty”. Ensuring freedom of movement in this context is a key concern for the Swiss Abroad. The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) fears that the breakdown of talks will jeopardise the residency rights of the 434,000 or so Swiss living in EU countries.

Brussels tightens the screw

Of its own accord, the Federal Council wants to align Swiss legislation with EU law to maintain the bilateral approach. The idea is that this will prevent a backlash and preserve

Switzerland’s interests. The government also intends to make its outstanding Cohesion Fund payment to Brussels, intended to help poorer EU member states. According to Cassis, this is “the admission fee for access to the single market”. It is also meant as an olive branch to the EU. In September, parliament will decide whether to approve the payment worth 1.3 billion Swiss francs. Politicians had already sanctioned the payment in December 2019, albeit on the proviso that the EU refrain from taking punitive measures against Switzerland.

Brussels has already started to tighten the screw. Since the end of May, companies that export medical technology have faced significant administrative hurdles to getting their products certified in the EU. This is a direct consequence of the collapse of the framework agreement, raising fears that unfettered access to the EU single market will now be eroded further. Trouble also looms regarding access to the Horizon Europe research programme. If the EU restricts access or goes as far as barring Switzerland from the programme altogether, this would hinder mobility particularly among the student and academic community.

New bilateral agreements on areas such as electricity trading are completely off the table for now. A blackout is unlikely in Switzerland, even without an electricity treaty. Yet the risk of critical situations occurring on the power grid will increase if the network operators are excluded from the EU’s cooperation platform.

Not everyone is pessimistic about the future. Economic historian Tobias Straumann believes that Brussels will settle for a pragmatic course sooner or later – as it did during negotiations with the now-departed UK. “The EU and its member states are used to handling variations, granting exceptions and making pragmatic decisions,” he wrote in the “NZZ am Sonntag”.

For more information on Swiss-EU relations, see the “Swiss Review” online dossier: <http://revue.link/europadossier>

This dossier also contains relevant position papers prepared by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (in French and German).



Swiss voters buck the green trend

Switzerland is veering from its set course on climate change. Voters have rejected the beefed-up CO₂ Act, making the goals of the Paris Agreement even harder to achieve.

THEODORA PETER

The CO₂ Act – actually quite a stereotypically Swiss piece of compromise legislation – appeared to have broad-based support following the gains made by the green parties at the national elections. However, the electorate rejected the bill’s measures to reduce harmful emissions, with 51.6 per cent voting no in the 13 June referendum. A narrow majority evidently balked at the idea of having to dig deeper into their pockets for airline tickets and car fuel. However, push-back also came from elements of the youth climate movement who said that the measures did not go far enough in the fight against climate change. The CO₂ Act failed not least because the FDP was unable to persuade its liberal voter base to endorse green levies and government inter-

vention. FDP leader Petra Gössi, who had steered her party in an environmentally friendly course (see edition 5/2020 of “Swiss Review”), announced her resignation the day after the vote, but denied that her departure had anything to do with the result.

Environment Minister Simonetta Sommaruga (SP) has been left to pick up the pieces. “The proposal probably had too many elements and was easier to attack as a result,” she explained after the vote. On the other hand, the Federal Councillor did not interpret the result as a flat no to more climate protection, despite it now being “very difficult” to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. Switzerland has pledged to halve harmful greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and become carbon-neutral by 2050. “It will be

almost impossible to achieve this without additional measures,” Sommaruga said. The environment minister has set her sights in the short term on promoting the less controversial elements of the bill, such as companies being exempted from the CO₂ levy if they invest in environmentally friendly solutions.

Hopes rest on the Glacier Initiative

Supporters of the CO₂ Act are now pinning their hopes on the “Glacier Initiative”. This proposal, submitted back in November 2019, aims to write the Paris Agreement goals into the Constitution and outlaw the use of fossil fuels such as gas, oil and coal. The initiative is backed by environmental groups as well as representatives of all the political parties – except the SVP, which campaigned against the CO₂ Act.

Parliament will debate the initiative and any counterproposal over the next few months before voters can have their say. Furthermore, the Federal Council has raised the prospect of a proposal to promote domestic and renewable energy.

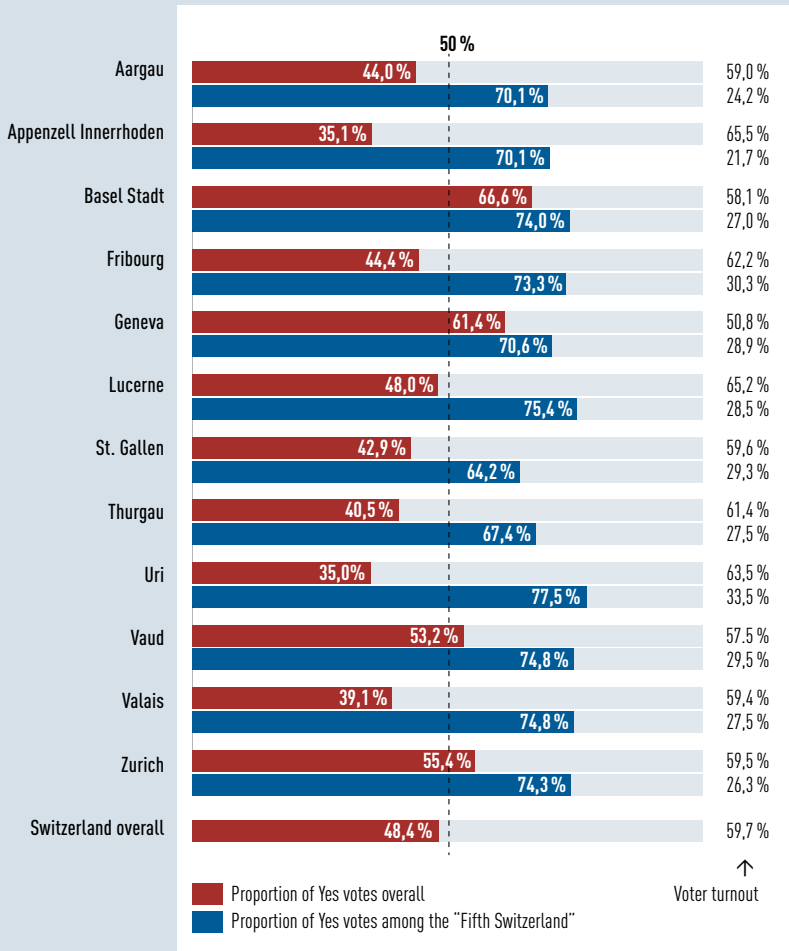
The left-green parties and the climate movement are targeting banks and insurance companies, saying that environmentally damaging investments ultimately make the financial sector one of the biggest drivers of the climate crisis. Whether a popular initiative would be launched remained to be seen at the time of going to press. The Young Greens, for their part, are trying to attract support for an “environmental responsibility initiative”

Protests from youth climate activists (like the ones here in Berne) left the majority of voters unmoved, with the electorate rejecting the CO₂ Act – the most important element in Swiss climate policy to date.

Photo: Marc Lettau



An emphatic yes from the “Fifth Switzerland”



Unlike the domestic electorate, the Swiss Abroad were clearly in favour of the CO₂ Act. In ten out of the 12 cantons that actually record votes from the “Fifth Switzerland” separately, over 70 per cent of Swiss Abroad voted for the CO₂ Act (see our table). In the canton of Uri, where the proposal flopped with a mere 35,0 per cent support, a record 77,5 per cent of voters from the “Fifth Switzerland” said yes to the new legislation.

To coincide with the dispatch of voting papers for the 13 June vote, the federal government conducted a survey among around 1,600 Swiss Abroad in Australia, Brazil and Thailand. To test alternative methods of dispatch, half of respondents received voting papers via their local embassy, while the other half received their documents the conventional way by post. The results of the trial and the findings of the survey were still outstanding at the time of going to press. (TP)

to protect the world’s natural resources. However, a lot of precious time will be lost before plebiscites like this are put to the people. Switzerland has done relatively well on climate protection until now, compared to other countries. In the an-

nual Climate Change Performance Index, it moved up two places to 14th position at the end of 2020. Defeat for the CO₂ Act has now seriously dented Swiss ambitions in the fight against climate change. <https://gletscher-initiative.ch>

Overview of all the other poll results on 13 June:

Double no to the “clean drinking water” and “pesticide” initiatives

The use of pesticides in agriculture will not be banned. The electorate rejected both the “clean drinking water initiative” and the “pesticide initiative”, with around 61 per cent voting no in both cases. Opposition was particularly strong in rural areas. The majority of voters from the “Fifth Switzerland” approved both initiatives.

Yes to the Anti-Terror Act

The police now have greater powers to act pre-emptively against people who pose a terrorist or violent-extremist threat. Around 57 per cent of voters gave their backing to the Federal Act on Police Counterterrorism Measures.

Yes to the Covid-19 Act

Voters support the federal government’s stance on the coronavirus, with 60 per cent having approved the Covid-19 Act at the polls. In particular, the legislation – in force until the end of the year – regulates measures to support companies and self-employed individuals affected by the pandemic.



Giving the children of alternative families better legal protection is one of the objectives of the “Marriage for all” project.
Photo: Keystone



Alternative families are here to stay – now they want greater recognition

Alternative families are becoming more commonly accepted in Switzerland. Now they face an important milestone. On 26 September, voters will decide whether same-sex couples can marry.

EVELINE RUTZ

Alternative or “non-traditional” families live more openly in Switzerland than they did a decade or two ago. Same-sex couples are fulfilling their wish to have children. Members of the LGBTQI community who used to live “conventionally” are coming out and reaffirming their relationships. The Reformed Church has given same-gender partnerships its blessing. Even some Catholic ministers are doing likewise in complete contradiction to the Vatican’s position. “Society has changed a great deal,” says Maria von Känel, managing director of the umbrella organisation representing alternative families in Switzerland, and co-chair of the “Marriage for all” committee. Increased acceptance means that alternative families have become more mainstream, she adds. Even conservative circles have sat up and taken notice.

Switzerland has, to date, been fairly slow in giving legal recognition to diverse lifestyles. It introduced registered partnerships in 2007 and stepchild adoption in 2018. Now the Federal Council and parliament want to go one step further with the “Marriage for all” proposal, under which

same-sex couples would be able to get married and have the same rights as married heterosexual couples when it comes to areas such as naturalisation, inheritance, pension provision, and hospital visits. In future, they would also be able to identify themselves as “married” on official forms.

Furthermore, married female couples in Switzerland would have the chance to receive sperm donations. Their children would have the same rights from birth as the children of heterosexual married couples. “Families with two mothers are here to stay. They are a part of our society and should have the same rights as everyone else,” says GLP National Councillor Kathrin Bertschy, who began calling for a change in the law back in 2013. For Bertschy, the issue at stake in the 26 September referendum feels behind the times. Indeed, 28 other countries have already extended marriage to same-sex couples – starting with the Netherlands in 2001.

Tortuous path through parliament

In Switzerland, the ball began rolling over 20 years ago.

However, it was not until 2020 that the National Council and the Council of States declared their support for the “Marriage for all” initiative. The new make-up of parliament is a factor that led to this “milestone” and “incredible leap forward”, as jubilant supporters described it – the liberal part of the political spectrum having made substantial gains in the 2019 elections.

Switzerland has difficulty digesting social reforms, says Bertschy. “The advantage of our democracy is that it stops us from making overhasty decisions. On the flip side, it is slow to produce legislation quickly enough to reflect social change.”

Parliament’s decision goes too far, according to conservative groups, which have collected more than 60,000 signatures to give the electorate the last word. Their arguments are partly religious. Marriage is reserved solely for heterosexual couples in the Bible, they say. It is a symbiosis of man and woman for the purpose of having children. What opponents dislike most about the initiative is that it paves the way for married female couples to receive sperm donations. The children of these couples will be deliberately deprived of a father, and their well-being will suffer as a result, they lament. Critics also fear that it will lead to lobbying for other things like egg donations and surrogacy. “It simply goes way too far,” says the EVP party chair Marianne Streiff.

No, it does not, and no, this certainly is not the thin end of the wedge, insists the “Marriage for all” committee. No, the aim is for equality – to which every person is entitled under the constitution, regardless of how they lead their lives. Supporters point out that children can find out the sperm donor’s identity as soon as they turn 18. The proposal makes no mention of egg donations or surrogacy, both of which remain illegal in Switzerland.

“An ideal that is past its sell-by date”

Alternative families are part and parcel of today’s world, says Yv E. Nay of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences. All studies have shown that a child’s well-being does not depend on the sexual preference of its parents but on the quality of the relationship and the family environment. Nay finds that political discussions about the rights of LGBTIQ parents are based on traditional, preconceived notions that have little to do with real life as far as alternative families are concerned. “People are still hanging on to an ideal that is actually past its sell-by date and, in truth, only existed for a very short time, if at all.”

The “Marriage for all” proposal would confer parental rights from birth to lesbian couples starting a family. At



When it comes to the notion of family, Yv E. Nay says that people are “hanging on to an ideal that is actually past its sell-by date”.

Photo: Keystone



Kathrin Bertschy: “Families with two mothers are here to stay. They are a part of our society.”

Photo: Keystone



Maria von Känel: “Society has changed a great deal. The majority of people in Switzerland want to see equality.”

Photo: Keystone



Marianne Streiff fears that the new legislation will lead to lobbying for things like egg donations and surrogacy: “It simply goes way too far.”

Photo: Keystone

The “99 per cent initiative”

Voters on 26 September will also answer the following question, posed by the Young Socialists in their “99 per cent initiative”: should tax on capital income increase? The electorate must decide whether tax on capital income such as interest, rental income, and dividends should be one and a half times higher than regular income tax, albeit with a tax-exempt annual personal allowance (100,000 Swiss francs, say the authors of the initiative) applying to this arrangement. The extra revenue would be used to ease the tax burden on low-income earners, although social welfare in areas such as education and healthcare would also benefit. (ERU)

present, only the biological mother is legally recognised as a parent. Her female partner can apply for stepchild adoption, but the adoption process can only begin one year after the child’s birth at the earliest and will often take several years to complete. “The child has insufficient legal protection during this time,” says von Känel. The new legislation would correct this inequality and save all concerned a great deal of anguish. It would grant same-sex couples many other fundamental rights that a registered partnership is unable to cover. “This is why ‘Marriage for all’ is an absolute necessity.”

Greater acceptance

The odds of “Marriage for all” getting an emphatic yes at the polls are looking good. According to a government study published in 2019, society has become more accepting of alternative families, with 58 per cent of women and 43 per cent of men saying that a child can also grow up happily in a same-sex family. More than half of respondents (65 per cent of women and 53 per cent of men) think that same-sex couples should have the same rights as heterosexual couples. A survey conducted by the gfs.bern research institute on behalf of Pink Cross, Switzerland’s national umbrella organisation of gay and bisexual men, also reveals widespread acceptance. Asked whether they were in favour of “Marriage for all”, 63 per cent of respondents answered with “yes” and 18 per cent with “generally yes”. “The majority of people in Switzerland want to see equality,” von Känel concludes.

LGBTIQ, which appears in this article, is the abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people.

Covid-19 to bring nursing staff more than applause

Nursing staff in Switzerland: feted as heroes during the pandemic, they have had to go above and beyond the call of duty for quite some time now. Parliament has plans to improve their situation, although the nurses say this is not enough. The people will now decide on the nursing care initiative.

SUSANNE WENGER

Switzerland in late spring 2021: the number of infections was going down, garden restaurants and gyms opened again, the vaccination campaign was progressing. People did not want to hear any more talk about Covid-19. However, in the hospitals, it was a different story. Healthcare personnel were still fighting to save lives. The third wave saw younger people in particular ending up in intensive care. "It put extraordinary pressure on the nursing staff again," says Yvonne Ribí, managing director of the Swiss Professional Association of Nurses (SBK).

For almost one and a half years, the nursing staff "have given their all, in hospitals and retirement homes", says Ribí. Now they are exhausted, "physically, psychologically and emotionally". The people were grateful for the massive effort by healthcare staff. On a given day in March 2020, they applauded all across the country from their balconies. This broad public recognition also raised awareness of nurses' situation. The largest professional group in the Swiss healthcare system has been pointing out their problematic employment conditions for a number of years.

Criticism of the extreme pressure

The fact that average monthly salaries have hardly increased in years is just one bone of contention. Pressure at work is the main issue for nursing staff. There is not enough time to care properly for the patients and retirement home residents, they say. Of course it is true that professional groups represent their own interests. Healthcare costs in Switzerland are rising, the financial pressure on institutions is increasing. And nursing by its very nature is a sensitive area when it comes to cutting costs. By European standards, nursing in Switzerland is admittedly not badly off in terms of the number of nursing staff per thousand inhabitants. Nevertheless, the complaints are not unfounded.

There are not enough qualified nurses in the country. Thousands of jobs remain unfilled; teams have to work round that. Moreover, given the growing number of old people and the increase in chronic illnesses, the situation may well worsen. According to an expert report, there will be a shortfall of 65,000 nurses across all training levels by 2030 if no action is taken. This is partly due to the fact that only about half of the number of nurses in Switzerland that will be required in the future are currently undergoing training. As a result, there is a lot of recruitment from outside the country.

A high turnover rate

Qualified nurses find their work fulfilling. At the same time, the demands of the job plus the shifts are draining. More than 40 per cent of nursing staff in Switzerland, many of whom are relatively young, are leaving the profession, according to a report by Swiss Health Observatory Obsan. The turnover rate is higher in nursing than in other healthcare sector jobs. The "for strong nursing" initiative submitted in 2017 aims to counter this situation. The petition was initiated by the SBK and is the largest mobilisation in the professional association's history. The nursing initiative calls for improved training, quality assurance through more staff, fair employment conditions and improved recognition of the profession.

For the Federal Council and parliament the initiative goes too far. They argue that regulations regarding specific professional groups do not belong in the Federal Constitution. The cantons and social partners should decide on nurses' employment conditions themselves. However, the pandemic has prompted parliament to address some of these concerns via an indirect counterproposal. The Federation and cantons intend to contribute almost a billion Swiss francs towards training more nursing staff in Switzerland. Moreover, nurses will be able to charge certain services directly to the health insurer.

Nursing to be assigned more competencies

This will mean the end of a legal anachronism: nurses in Switzerland can complete a Master's degree and carry a lot of responsibility on a daily basis. At the same time, their services must, to date, be prescribed by a doctor in order for the health insurance to pay. Nurses will now have more

competencies. A majority in both chambers of parliament agreed that action at a political level is needed to address the skills shortage. There are indications that the proportion of people leaving the profession will increase further following the pandemic, said Ticino SP member of the Council of States and doctor Marina Carobbio: “The immense pressures have had a major impact on nurses’ health.”

For the people behind the nursing initiative the counterproposal represents a major achievement. Nonetheless, they took the decision before the summer break to stick to their guns. The issue will go before the people, in November at the earliest. The SBK is insisting on the points that parliament failed to entertain, especially regarding a tangible improvement in employment conditions. It says binding requirements are needed, such as a maximum number of patients for a nurse to attend to during a shift.

No compromise from the SBK

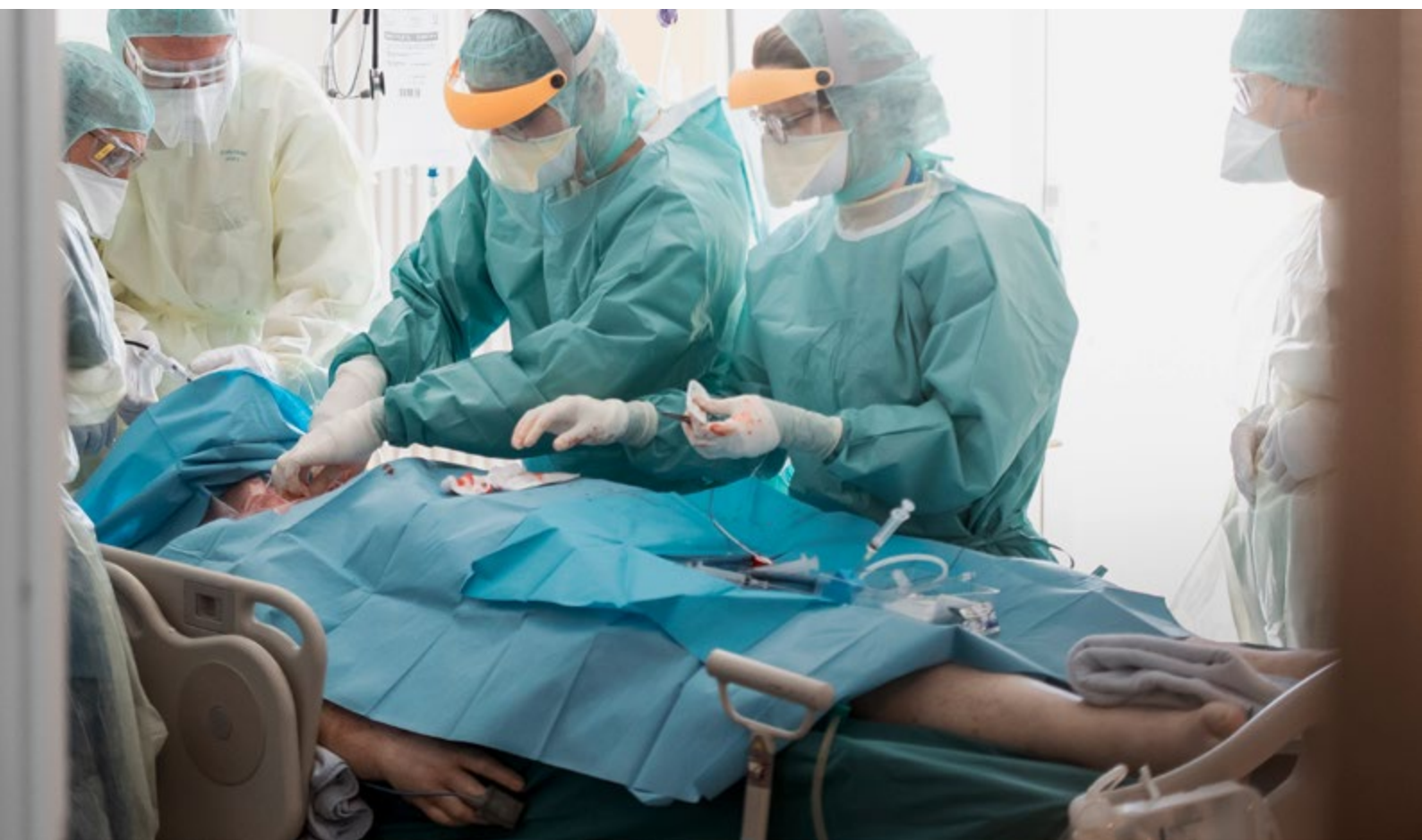
Nursing representative Yvonne Ribl says: “What use is improved training when so many nurses are leaving the job?”

Federal involvement is needed because it is a question of the financing mechanisms in the Swiss healthcare system. Nurses are not paid enough, she argues. Healthcare institutions also want to see improvements in remuneration. Nevertheless, they prefer the indirect counterproposal. If the people and cantons approve the initiative, the parliamentary process would then start from the beginning and the urgent measures taken to address the skills shortage would be delayed by years, say the associations representing hospitals, care homes and Spitex.

If the initiative is rejected at the polls, the counterproposal will come into force. Basel CVP cantonal government member Lukas Engelberger, president of the Conference of Cantonal Health Directors, defends the compromise. The allocation of staff cannot be determined from the top, he says, and the initiative could entail high costs. One thing is for sure: Swiss nursing professionals are now counting on the support of the people. The prospects look good – not least due to Covid-19, a once in a century crisis.

Nurses in Ticino hospital La Carita caring for a Covid-19 patient.

After months of working under constant pressure, the staff are physically, psychologically and emotionally drained. Photo: Keystone

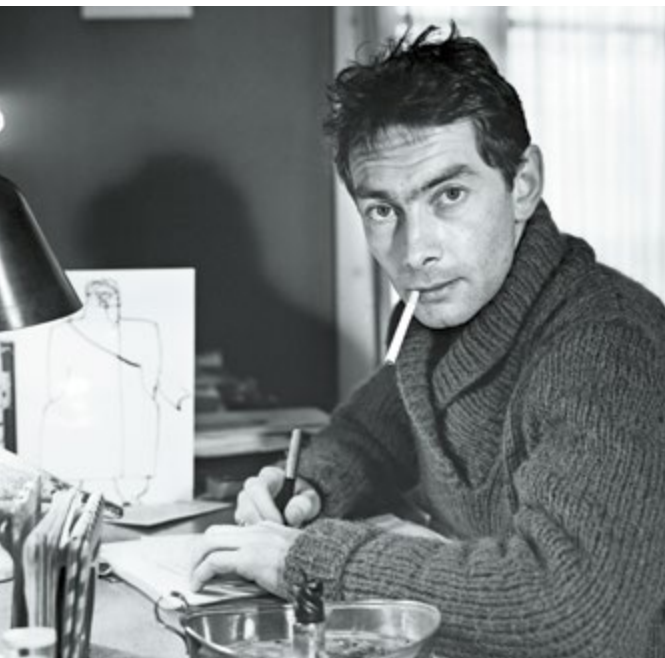


To Japan and Afghanistan in a Topolino

Nicolas Bouvier drove through Asia in an old car from 1953 to 1957. His account of this intrepid journey still holds fascination today.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

Two Swiss had the good fortune to own a Topolino – that iconic, diminutive, poetically named “little mouse” manufactured by Fiat from 1936 to 1955: Migros founder Gottlieb Duttweiler (1888–1962), who somehow managed to squeeze his ample frame into the tiny car that is currently exhibited at the Swiss Museum of Transport in Lucerne; and Nico-



las Bouvier (born on 6 March 1929 in Grand-Lancy near Geneva; died on 17 February 1998 in Geneva), who set out in his Topolino in summer 1953 with artist friend Thierry Vernet on an overland journey to Asia, inquisitive and open to the unanticipated adventures and the illumination and self-discovery that lay ahead.

Irresistibly effortless

They were an idle pair who had two years to play with, enough money to last four months, and an itinerary that took in Turkey, Iran, India and Japan. They would see deserts, mountain passes, cities, and bustling markets, as well as nature in its unrelenting beauty. Bouvier had already visited Lapland, North Africa and the Balkans. But now he was entering the unknown with a fresh outlook and an open-heartedness towards people and things – an attitude

unique to someone who believed that the act of travel was “irresistibly effortless, providing a slow but sure introduction to transparency and overcoming one’s self”.

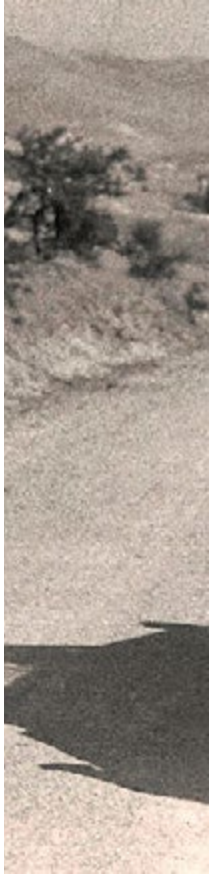
A new style of travelogue

Bouvier recounts the first stage of their journey, from Belgrade to Kabul, in his 1963 book “The Way of the World”. To cover the costs of the journey, Vernet sold his paintings and Bouvier wrote newspaper articles. The inimitable way in which Bouvier describes their adventures is evident for the first time in this book. Exceptional in his tone, choice of words, and narrative rhythm, Bouvier consistently gets to the heart of the matter, from people to places, always endeavouring to add a human touch to an intrinsically inhuman world. And Bouvier introduces us not only to faraway places, but also to the inner workings of his mind – one that is imbued with subtle emotions and considerable knowledge.

The two friends parted ways on the road after one and a half years, and Bouvier subsequently continued on his own via India to China and then onwards to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), where he remained for nine months. In “The Scorpion-Fish”, Bouvier described in 1982 how Ceylon’s hot, humid climate sapped his energy – but also how his senses were sharpened while documenting both the insects and the shady localities of this fascinating, frightening island. He left Ceylon in October 1955 and took a French steamboat to Japan, where he stayed for a year, compiling the material that he would share in his 1970 book “The Japanese Chronicles”.

A low point

Back in Europe, where in 1958 he married Eliane Petitpierre – the



“You do not travel to decorate yourself with exoticism and anecdotes, like a Christmas tree, but for the journey to pluck you, rinse you, wring you out, and hand you back like one of those towels worn out by washes that you’re given with a dash of soap in the brothels.”

(Nicolas Bouvier, “Le Poisson-scorpion” [The Scorpion Fish], Éditions Gallimard, Paris 1996)



daughter of a Federal Councillor – and soon became the father of two children, Bouvier needed years to put the fruitful experiences of his four-year trip into writing. The author, who wrestled with every word and was a stickler for accuracy, soon went through a deep, personal crisis that plunged him into despair and alcoholism – an episode that found expression in his 1982 book of poems “Le Dehors et le Dedans” (Inside and outside). But it was precisely by recalling the distant memory of his time in faraway countries that he managed to pull himself out of the abyss. For many, Bouvier’s singular relationship with far-flung localities made him a credible decipherer of the human condition and an utterly unique travel writer.

“Savour the sweetness of life”

From 1963, Bouvier produced a flurry of works reminiscing on his extensive travels between 1953 and 1957. But he also covered subsequent visits to Japan, Korea and China, as well as producing a notable, vivid account of his time on the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland. Even after his death in 1998, Bouvier – whose mantra was “savour the sweetness of life and the art of living, as if today were your last” – has continued to inspire people around the world to travel with inquisitive, open eyes and treat the unknown with love and respect. Translated into all the main languages, his books have lost none of their magic, not least in this era of mass tourism.

Many of Nicolas Bouvier’s books are available in French, German and English.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST IN ZÜRICH

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Switzerland in figures

Cow wins on recount. Marmot thwarted.

10 000

Switzerland has no official national animal. Comedian Claudio Zuccolini therefore decided to hold a plebiscite on the matter. The nominees? Cow, ibex, bear and lion. But the marmot, which had missed out in the nominations, suddenly surged ahead with 10,000 votes. Apparently, the poll had been hacked. Via e-voting. Ouch. The cow won in the end, garnering 52% of the votes. A beef retailer from Grisons, no less, announced this victory for all bovines. In no way is that suspicious.

330

Are they going to take place? The fate of the 2021 Olympic Games in Tokyo was still in the balance at the time of going to press. Notwithstanding this, Switzerland has won 330 Olympic medals in total at the Winter and Summer Games to date. The only Olympics at which we won nothing were in 1908, 1912 and 1964.

37 710 400 000

The Swiss National Bank announced profits of 37.7 billion Swiss francs in the first quarter of 2021 – shuffling uneasily in the process, given that this is a deluge of money. The same figure would be enough to cover footballer Lionel Messi’s salary for 248 years – or pay out a lump sum of 4,351 francs to every person in Switzerland.

10

Mandatory, pandemic-related work-from-home policies are now being relaxed. Opinion polls show that only 10 per cent of us want to continue working exclusively from home. Yet most of us want greater flexibility to switch between home and office working in future.

2

Travel operators say that many Swiss families double-booked their summer holidays this year, depending on whether they could go abroad or not. Hence, the current flood of cancellations was inevitable.

FIGURES COMPILED BY MARC LETTAU

“That deep connection with Europe is being called into question”

He has been passionate in his efforts to preserve Switzerland's memory of the Holocaust. And he wants the “Fifth Switzerland” to have greater political clout. Outgoing OSA President Remo Gysin looks back – and ahead.

INTERVIEW: MARC LETTAU

Mr Gysin, you were born shortly before the end of the Second World War. And now you are campaigning for a Swiss Holocaust memorial. Will the memorial project be your lasting legacy?

This is a subject that has always moved me. The war and its consequences and the atrocities of the Holocaust were something we always talked about at school and at home. It is a very difficult subject. I still can't comprehend what happened.

But, decades later, tell us what motivated you to reignite the conversation by proposing a memorial.

“Beobachter” set the ball rolling in 2017 with a novel take on the subject. The magazine focused on the people with Swiss passports who were victims of the horrors of that era, the Swiss fighters in the French Resistance, and Switzerland's Jewish expatriates. However, victims also included women who lost their Swiss citizenship through marriage – and consequently any protection that Switzerland may otherwise have given them. This moved me deeply.

No one loses their Swiss citizenship through marriage now. Swiss Abroad generally get greater protection and recognition than they did back then. Things seem to be different these days.

By no means is everything perfect. Take the current resurgence in anti-Semitism. When tensions escalate between Israel and Palestine, for example, this poses a renewed threat to Swiss Abroad. But other people in the



Remo Gysin presenting the Holocaust memorial project in Berne. Photo: Keystone

“Fifth Switzerland” also need our protection, such as those affected by natural disasters or by poverty.

The groundwork for a Swiss Holocaust memorial has been laid. Do any past highlights that you remember pale in comparison?

My 20 years in the OSA have been full of memorable moments. In particular, all the personal encounters that I have had with Swiss Abroad. I was also lucky enough that the start of my presidential term coincided with the OSA's 100th-anniversary celebrations.

A spectacular way to start.

This was followed by other spectacular moments, such as the Swiss Abroad Day at the 2019 “Fête des Vignerons” (winegrowers' festival) in Vevey. Even the pandemic was remarkable in a

completely different way. I thought it was incredible how swiftly we were able to switch to entirely new forms of communication.

If memorable moments shape our view of the past, then the future is all about the challenges that lie ahead. For example, the framework agreement with the EU is dead. Switzerland walking away from the negotiations raises many questions regarding the future of things such as international mobility, freedom of establishment, freedom of movement, health insurance, and social security. There is now a great deal of uncertainty.

We are conducting this interview in Basel. If you looked around you would not notice any difference here.

“Regarding the framework agreement, the Federal Council has acted unilaterally. This strikes at the heart of our democracy.”

A city like Basel would be unable to function without all the cross-border commuters who prop up our health system and practically every sector of the economy. You would certainly notice the difference eventually. That deep connection with Europe is now being called into question. The abandonment of negotiations means that we have anything but clarity. It raises questions, not least because nobody bothered to think of the over 400,000 Swiss who live in the EU.

You were already critical of Switzerland’s EU policy when you were National Councilor – and you still are now.

Key questions have shaped Swiss foreign policy for as long as I can remember. What do we want? And who is responsible? Parliament’s right to have a say is enshrined in the Constitution. As is the people’s right to have the final word and call referendums where appropriate. But now the Federal Council has acted unilaterally. This strikes at the heart of our democracy.

Does this make you want to campaign again in favour of Switzerland joining the EU?

Let me put it this way: the Federal Council’s decision to pull out of the talks has put the possibility of EU membership into sharper focus again.

It would be interesting to hear the Swiss Abroad speak out on such key matters. But critics say that the voice of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) is nothing more than a whisper.

The OSA has good political connections nowadays. Our influence has increased. We liaise closely with parlia-

mentarians and the relevant authorities. The CSA also represents the “Fifth Switzerland” much more effectively than before. But I have to admit that we are still a long way from where we want to be. If the CSA wants to increase its political clout, it needs to have greater legitimacy. We must therefore ensure that all Swiss adults living abroad are able to participate in the CSA elections in future. That is also how I believe democracy should work.

The plan is for e-voting to come into full use for the first time at the 2025 CSA elections. Would that be a milestone?

E-voting makes everything easier. That applies to federal and cantonal elections and popular votes. But having our own e-voting system is also crucial to conducting the CSA elections. And if we want a higher turnout, it is basically up to us to make it happen. Take Australia, Mexico and the UK, for example, where expatriates on the ground have ensured that as many Swiss as possible can vote. This is what we want to see.

Are there any hot potatoes awaiting your successor?

Just the usual issues. Many in the “Fifth Switzerland” are unable to exercise their political rights as Swiss citizens; the banks continue to be a thorn in our side; and the political squeeze on the Swiss Abroad shows no sign of abating here in Switzerland.

In other words, there is increasing clamour within parliament to restrict the civil rights of the Swiss Abroad.

Precisely. But if they want to renegotiate these civil rights, let us choose a completely different direction. Why don’t we create a dedicated constituency for the “Fifth Switzerland”? This would provide the Swiss Abroad firstly with better representation and, secondly, with much greater exposure. However, the main thing to be aware of is that the nature of mobility has changed. People tend to stay abroad for shorter periods of time. They come and they go. This is a strong argument against restricting the political voice of Swiss who live abroad. At the end of the day, our politically interested compatriots abroad contribute greatly to Switzerland’s image as an open, interconnected, sustainable, outward-looking country.

What would Switzerland be like without the “Fifth Switzerland”?

Only half of what it is.

Remo Gysin, born in 1945, was an SP politician for many years and has been a member of the OSA Executive Committee since 2001. He became the OSA President in 2015 and will be stepping down from office at the end of August 2021.

A holistic approach to camp leadership

The young leading the young – a normal sight at most Swiss children’s and youth holiday camps. And the reason why young people in Switzerland receive training specifically dedicated to preparing them for camp leadership.

MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER

Hundreds of campfires are lit every evening across Switzerland between July and August during the summer holiday camp season, when numerous children’s and youth organisations host tent, biking and hiking camps or organise group accommodation. One such camp provider is the Youth Service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), whose camps are geared to providing teenagers and young adults from the “Fifth Switzerland” aged 15 or older with an unforgettable holiday in their “other” home country and an opportunity to strengthen their ties to Switzerland.

Meanwhile, the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) runs nine camps each year for children aged eight to 14. The aim of these camps is to enable Swiss children living abroad to experience their native country for the first time or to get to know it better, offering them the chance to visit the sights, explore lakes, mountains, rivers and other scenery, go on short hikes, play games, take part in sport and do handicrafts and drawings.

Thanks to the OSA Youth Service and the FYSA, around 400 children, teenagers and young adults are able to visit Switzerland each year.

Holiday camps help to promote sport

This holiday selection for young people from the “Fifth Switzerland” belongs to a whole array of Swiss holiday camps that are simultaneously a part of Youth and Sport (Y+S) – the federal government’s biggest national scheme to promote sport and physical exercise. Each year, some 80,000 sports courses and dedicated camps take place with around 637,000 child and youth participants. The Confederation and cantons provide training to prospective Y+S leaders in various sports for the purpose of managing camps.



Leaders in children’s and youth organisations such as the Swiss Guide and Scout Movement receive leadership training in the “Camp Sports/Trekking” category. FYSA and OSA Youth Service leaders have often done this training already, because they are involved in other such organisations. The FYSA also offers a Y+S leadership training course every year to those who have not yet completed one, in collaboration with the OSA Youth Service.

During their training, prospective camp leaders complete various stages in which they gradually take on more responsibility. They learn how to plan and carry out activities, and how to interact with and instruct children and young people to create memorable experiences for them. In particular, they are trained in how to conduct outdoor activities and taught about the relevant safety precautions.

“When we train them, we teach them how to minimise risk and how to respond when even the best preparations go awry,” says Marco Gyger, the “Camp Sports/Trekking” training course coordinator at the Federal Office of Sport.

A special type of sport

“Camp sports and trekking is a special type of sport of which I am proud. This is because sporting performance is not the priority. We follow a holistic approach instead,” says Gyger. Intellectual, moral and physical well-being count equally.

Incidentally, there is no shortage of new people wanting to teach this sport. Thanks to word of mouth, the FYSA and the OSA Youth Service find sufficient numbers of staff each year. These include many who are already actively involved in youth organisations as camp leaders and have therefore done the requisite training. To be camp leaders, they must be aged between 18 and 30 and go through an application process. Three quarters of those who are male do it as part of their civilian service. Many camp leaders are students at teacher-training university who will later enter the education profession.

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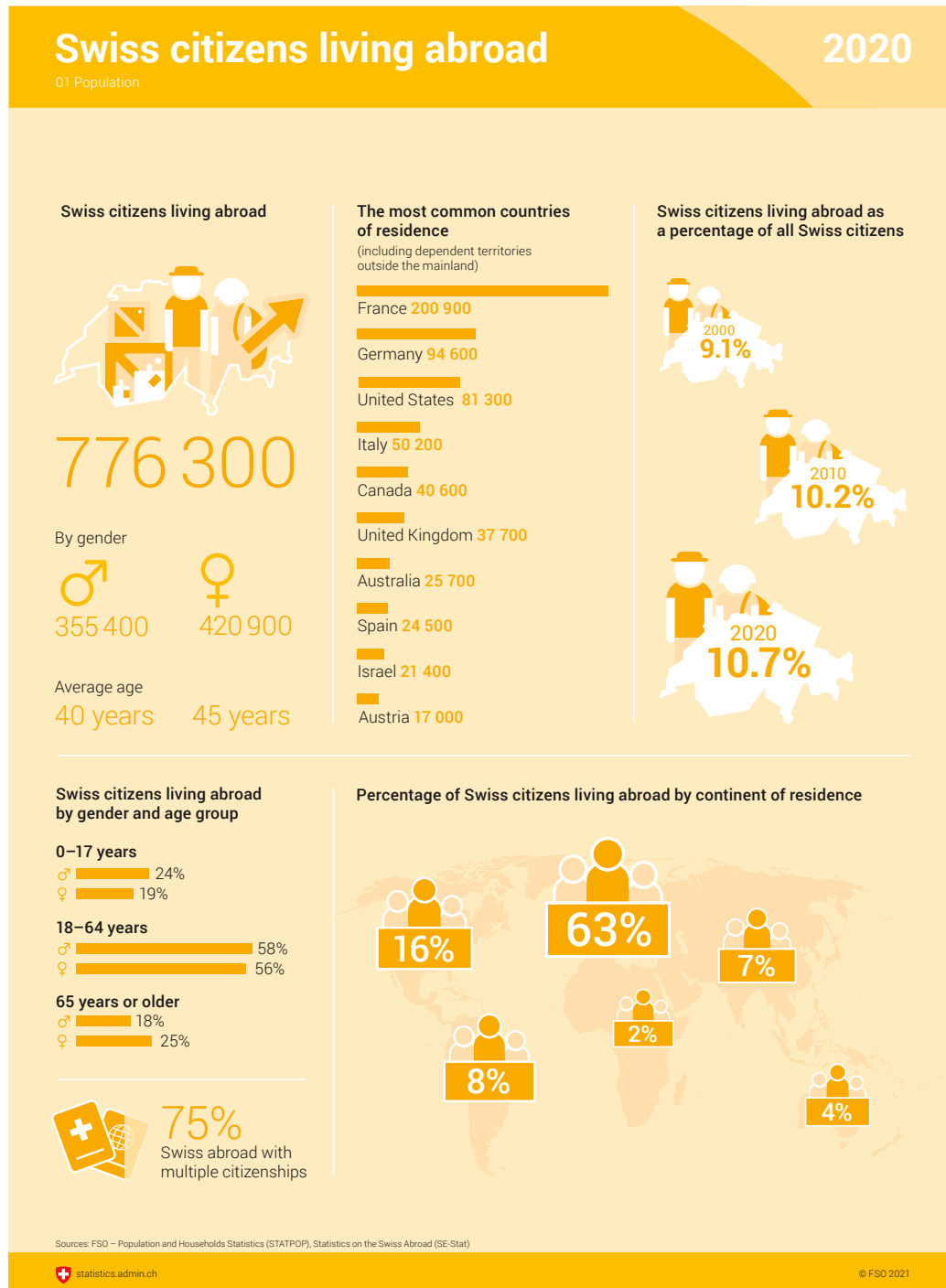
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Fondation pour les enfants suisses à l'étranger
Fondazione per i giovani svizzeri all'estero
Fundazion per giuven svizzers a l'ester

One fifth of Swiss Abroad are younger than 18

At the end of 2020, 776,300 Swiss were living abroad. The “Fifth Switzerland” therefore has roughly the same population as the canton of Vaud. Our focus on young people in this edition of “Swiss Review” is pertinent, not least in view of the latest government statistics on Swiss citizens living abroad, which show that 21 per cent of Swiss Abroad are under 18.



The number of Swiss who live abroad and are registered with a Swiss representation increased in 2020 by 0.7 per cent to 776,300. According to statistics published by the Federal Statistical Office, 163,800 of Swiss Abroad are under 18. This figure is slightly up on the previous year. Children and teenagers therefore account for a good fifth of the “Fifth Switzerland”.

In relation to this young demographic, it is noticeable how the numbers vary from continent to continent: up in Europe (+1.3%), but down in Africa (-5.6%), the Americas (-2.1%), Asia (-1.5%) and Oceania (-1.2%).

In absolute terms, France was home to the highest number of young people with Swiss passports at the end of 2020, with 42,500. Next came Germany (21,000), the USA (14,300), Israel (9,900), Italy (9,400) and the UK (8,800). The picture is different when we look at the proportion of young people in relation to the entire Swiss expatriate communities of individual countries. Israel is the country with the youngest Swiss community, with 46 per cent who are aged under 18. The UK, Chile, and Turkey have the next-youngest Swiss populations, with 24 to 28 per cent under 18.

More than four fifths of all 163,800 Swiss Abroad under 18 have one or more nationalities in addition to Swiss citizenship. The proportion is particularly high in countries including Turkey, Italy and Chile, where 94 to 97 per cent of the younger demographic have at least one other nationality.

Further information: Federal Statistical Office > Look for statistics > Population > Migration and integration > Swiss citizens living abroad

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Schools that promote Swiss values in addition to knowledge

The Swiss Confederation supports the 18 officially recognised Swiss schools abroad. All these places of learning not only provide Swiss education around the world, but also contribute to Switzerland's cultural footprint abroad, thereby promoting understanding of our country and its traditions and values.



Playing during the break at the Swiss School in Singapore. Photo provided

All the schools were established through private initiatives by Swiss expatriates. The oldest was founded in Italy as early as the 19th century. Schools were also established in Egypt – in Alexandria and Cairo – between 1921 and 1929, but these had to be closed by around 1970. The first schools popped up in Latin America during the Second World War, and later in Asia, while the most recent school to open was in Beijing in 2017. There are now 18 Swiss schools abroad in total, at which around 260 Swiss teaching staff currently give lessons to over 8,000 pupils, of whom some 1,500 are Swiss nationals.

At present, the federal government subsidises these Swiss schools in ten different countries to the tune of around 18 million Swiss francs each year, thereby covering an average of 25 to 30 per cent of their total operating expenses. The Confederation provides this financial support in accordance with the Swiss Schools Act, which was completely revised in 2014. Based on Article 14 of the Swiss Schools Act, the federal government also provides just under 430,000 francs in annual funding for Swiss education abroad at 11 locations where there are no Swiss schools.

Furthermore, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA) have a service agreement in place to support *educationsuisse*, the umbrella association of Swiss schools. *Educationsuisse* represents these schools' interests in Switzerland, providing them with a variety of services in areas such as administration and further education.

The Swiss schools abroad operate in accordance with Swiss teaching methods and the Swiss curriculum,

offering the Swiss high-school diploma and International Baccalaureat (IB) qualifications that open the way to further education in Switzerland or the relevant host country. In addition, each school has a “home canton” that provides educational advice and supervision.

From Brazil to Thailand

Swiss schools are located in the following countries and cities:

Brazil

- Colegio Suíço-Brasileiro, Curitiba
- Escola Suíço-Brasileira, São Paulo

Chile

- Colegio Suizo de Santiago, Santiago de Chile

China

- Swiss School Beijing

Italy

- Scuola Svizzera Bergamo
- Scuola Svizzera Catania
- Scuola Svizzera di Milano
- Scuola Svizzera di Milano in Cadorago/Como
- Scuola Svizzera di Roma

Colombia

- Colegio Helvetia, Bogotá

Mexico

- Colegio Suizo de México, Mexico City
- Colegio Suizo de México A.C., Cuernavaca
- Colegio Suizo de México A.C., Querétaro

Peru

- Colegio Pestalozzi, Lima

Singapore

- Swiss School in Singapore

Spain

- Colegio Suizo de Madrid
- Escuela Suiza de Barcelona

Thailand

- RIS Swiss Section in Bangkok

(RG)

Multilingualism (German, English, French, and the local language) is considered an important asset. The schools in Bogotá and Singapore also offer French in addition to German teaching. A dedicated French stream was introduced at the Swiss School in Singapore (SSiS) at the beginning of the 2019–20 school year. The school’s successful mixed-age-group learning approach also applies to this new stream, which now covers the entire primary school curriculum. Teaching in the German stream follows the “Lehrplan 21” curriculum that applies in Switzerland’s German-speaking cantons, while the French stream is based on the “PER” (Plan d’études romand) syllabus in the French-speaking cantons, albeit adapted to local conditions.

The Swiss schools are highly renowned in their respective host countries. Their graduates, of whom many are local, maintain a lifelong association with Switzerland.

RUTH VON GUNTEN, EDUCATIONSUISSE

Federal votes

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

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

The Federal Council decided that there will be two federal proposals submitted to the people on 26 September 2021:

- Federal Popular Initiative “Reduce tax on salaries, tax capital fairly”
- Amendment of the Swiss Civil Code (Marriage for all)

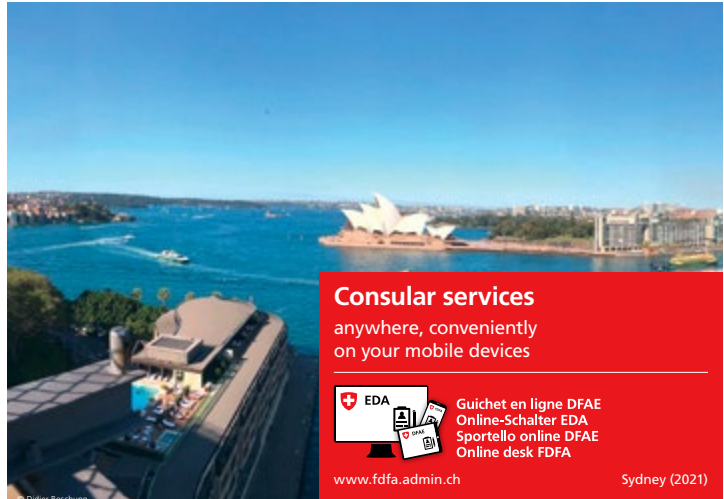
Popular initiatives

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


- No new popular initiatives have been launched.

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

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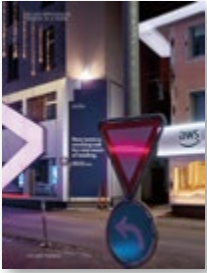


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www.fdfa.admin.ch Sydney (2021)

Davos, a town to rent



JULES SPINATSCH:
"Davos Is a Verb"
Lars Müller Publishers
2021, 304 pages,
273 illustrations;
CHF 50.00

As some of his teachers at the International Center of Photography in New York suggested to him, photographer Jules Spinatsch from Grisons has set his eye on a personal location. That place is Davos, the high-altitude town where he grew up. The work "Davos Is a Verb" shows the alpine town from the angle of its transformation for the World Economic Forum (WEF). It echoes the monumental work that he has already accomplished on the same theme using an automated photographic observation system. This time, the Swiss artist photographs the town with his camera in hand, looking at its transformation at the service of business, finance and politics. The images included in this work of 300 pages give

the impression of looking through a kaleidoscope. The colours of the photographs are saturated. They show global brands displaying their corporate language according to a sophisticated design. Luminous slogans promise growth, security, sustainable development and health all at once. "Unsmoke Your Mind" suggests cigarette manufacturer Phillip Morris. "Growth Forever" is the mantra displayed by the State of Karnataka. Facebook, Google, Black Rock, Huawei and their peers have taken up residence in cobbled together spaces or by transforming local businesses. The Chämi-Bar is disguised as Turkiye House. The Parsenn hotel has metamorphosed into a showroom for the AMTD Group. The roads from the station are full of black limousines and military vehicles. Men discuss oil and the environment over cocktails. "Davos Is a Verb" is an allusion to the fact that this town in Grisons is today conjugated in the language of the WEF. Money waters the resort. Some businesses remain empty for the whole year, as all they need to do is rent their premises for the WEF forum to stay in business. Jules Spinatsch documents in photos, almost one hundred businesses rented to Davos during this event. Bodyguards, empty or barricaded spaces, young women in conversation with businessmen: these are just some of the moments captured by the Swiss photographer. The vision is rigorous and complex. The eye stumbles through a labyrinth of details, transparencies and reflections. However, the catalogue paints a rather sober picture at the same time. And the presence of protestors disguised as clowns or as police officers adds to the discomfort. During the 2020 WEF, the 50th edition, Trump laughed at Greta Thunberg. This was before the global surge of Covid-19.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Formulaic reality



STEFANIE HEINZMANN:
"Labyrinth"
BMG, 2021

And again, that mischievous smile. That quaint Valais lilt. Stefanie Heinzmann wears her heart on her sleeve. She is a frequent fixture on Swiss television at the moment, starring on reality shows ("Das Schweizer Tauschkonzert", the Swiss version of The Best Singers), advertising health drinks, and plugging her new album.

But the singer from Visp – the former winner of a talent contest on Stefan Raab's late-night show "TV total" – does not have it easy. Heinzmann has exploited television very effectively since she first appeared on our screens in 2007. She is a celebrity, and the whole country knows her. This is both a blessing and a curse. Whereas Heinzmann can

always count on attracting the mainstream, more discerning audiences are chronically allergic to her. With the best will in the world, people are loath to consider reality stars as credible artists. Don't they have their own identity? No way. Not in the reality format – and not even during their subsequent careers.

It is easy to forget that Stefanie Heinzmann is in fact a successful performer in Germany and Switzerland and regularly releases albums containing songs that she has penned herself. The 32-year-old belies her celebrity status through the conventional no-frills manner in which she plies her trade.

Her new album "Labyrinth" therefore deserves a fair hearing. And, guess what, Heinzmann's sixth LP sounds pretty decent at first. The title track is a fresh, contemporary, groovy, funky electro-dance number. The second track "Best Life" has an infectious, catchy refrain. The next song "Would You Still Love Me" also begins promisingly. But then the album loses its way. Unfortunately, the music slips into a ready-made pattern that oscillates predictably between linear radio pop and a more club-centric sound.

Hamburg producer Steffen Graef has given Stefanie Heinzmann's songs the modern treatment, adding powerful keyboards, crisp beats and notable intensity. Heinzmann's soulful voice also shines through in places. This is when the Swiss artist sounds her most natural and genuine.

But what about having an identity? Although Stefanie Heinzmann comes across as likeable, the unflattering but unsurprising conclusion to make is that "Labyrinth" is formulaic music for a formulaic star. The naysayers still have a point.

MARKO LEHTINEN

OZ, beat magician



Once upon a time, there lived Ozan Yildirim, grandson of a Turkish immigrant. Ozan grew up in Toggenburg. He completed an apprenticeship in retailing, before working as a sales assistant at Fust. At night, the young man transformed into OZ (pronounced Ozi). He created rhythms in his basement using a software named Fruity Loop. The self-taught artist likes the deep beats of rapper 50 Cent. OZ also enjoys the musical atmosphere of the Caribbean. In 2012, the musician sent a series of tracks to American rapper Meek Mill, whose email address he had been keeping stored safely away. The creations of electronic artisan OZ caught the musician's ear, and he paid 3,000 dollars for them. "These days, a hit is just an email away," said the Swiss star to "Billboard" magazine. From beat to beat, OZ began to work with the greatest names in the world of rap, amongst them Canadian Drake (on "Toosie Slide") and American Travis Scott (on "Sicko Mode"). In June, the latter title had been played 1.4 billion times on musical platform Spotify. "He has a recognisable style and he knows how to capture the moment," said Swiss rapper Stress, discussing OZ. The man concocts his sounds in a recording studio based in Wald (ZH). According to the latest news, he still lives in his native Toggenburg, with his wife and child. His guilty pleasure? Fancy cars, including a Rolls Royce and a Lamborghini. It is said that during a trip to Zurich with friends, he was refused entry into nightclubs, whilst his own beats could be heard from inside. Switzerland doesn't know its own heroes!

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin meet in Geneva

Thirty-six years after hosting the legendary summit between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, Geneva again had the opportunity to cement its reputation for international relations when US President Joe Biden and the Russian leader Vladimir Putin met in the city for talks on 16 June 2021. How the encounter will affect the tense US-Russian relationship is still unclear, as the pair were evidently not in Geneva to make friends. (MUL)

Guy Parmelin meets Joe Biden

While Biden was in Geneva, he also met the president of the Swiss Confederation, Guy Parmelin. Above all, Parmelin used the rendezvous to push for talks on a free trade agreement, while Biden was mainly interested in urging Switzerland to buy US fighter jets. Rumours grew in the ensuing weeks that Switzerland had indeed picked US company Lockheed Martin's F-35 as its new fighter jet. (MUL)

Sobering news for the Swiss crypto market

The prospects of Switzerland soon becoming a safe haven for cryptocurrencies have been dealt a blow. Firstly, the Diem Association – a consortium with ties to Facebook – is moving its headquarters from Geneva to the USA. Diem has been targeting the launch of a global digital currency. Secondly, the Swiss financial regulator FINMA has informed the company Bitcoin Suisse that its application for a banking licence is ineligible for approval. This is sobering news for the Swiss bitcoin and crypto market. (MUL)

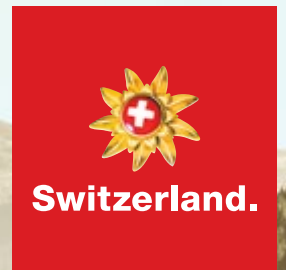
Parliament wants to raise the retirement age for women

In June, the National Council followed the lead of the Council of States by approving an increase in the female retirement age from 64 to 65. Women born between 1959 and 1964 would receive small offsetting payments for six years as a result of this change. The higher retirement age for women – a key element in the restructuring of the ailing voluntary old-age and survivors' insurance scheme (OASI) – could come into force in 2022, although the electorate is more likely to have a say first. Left-leaning parties, in particular, want to force a popular vote. (MUL)

Stricter rules on arms exports

Put under pressure by the "Stop arms exports to countries engaged in civil war" popular initiative, parliament is now pushing for stricter rules on arms exports. The Council of States has come out in favour of tightening the restrictions in order to curtail the Federal Council's authority to approve arms exports. The National Council still has to decide on the matter. (MUL)

I need a ticket to the great outdoors.



Filisur, Graubünden, © Rob Lewis

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