

MARCH 2023

# Swiss Review

The magazine  
for the Swiss Abroad



## An Egyptian mummy and the thorny Swiss debate about cultural property

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**YAPEAL**

**4 Focus**

Shep-en-Isis – the Egyptian mummy at the centre of a cultural debate

**8 Top pick / News****10 Society**

No more deliverances – the diocese of Chur calls time on its exorcist

**12 Images**

The Swiss museums giving shelter to Ukrainian paintings

**14 Report**

How a tiny, simple paper battery was named one of the world's best inventions

**18 Culture**

Switzerland's minority language Romansh is evolving quickly

**News from your region****22 Politics**

Switzerland is lagging behind on smoking prevention among young people

The 2023 elections – get on the electoral register now to have your say

**25 Profile**

Marco Sieber – Switzerland's future astronaut

**26 Notes from the Federal Palace**

The "Fifth Switzerland" also features in the new Swiss passport

**29 SwissCommunity news**

New banking package for Swiss Abroad

**30 Discussion**

Cover photo: The Shep-en-Isis sarcophagus at the St Gallen Abbey Library. Photo: iStock

# The deafening silence of Shep-en-Isis



Here's a quick, simple question: what is culture? The answer is not quite as straightforward and concise. There are a bewildering number of ways to explain culture and how we interact with it – and why it is more than just a trifling distraction. How about this for a definition? Culture embraces everything that humans create. Now add the word "art" – then we could say that both art and culture are an expression of human existence. Culture and its derivative, art, build identity – but not just individual identity. Culture is born of community, giving people a sense of belonging, a collective memory and a perspective of both the past and the future.

When you steal cultural property, you attack precisely these values. The Swiss museums currently going through their inventories with a fine-tooth comb because they own looted art are all too aware of this. Such complicated artefacts include treasures that were plundered by colonialists from the West African kingdom of Benin. Other countries have already decided to return their Benin objects. The matter is now on the agenda in Switzerland too.

Not all disputes related to cultural property arise from theft. Sometimes, the back story is a little murkier. Shep-en-Isis, the daughter of a priest, is a case in point. The Egyptian mummy and her ornate sarcophagus now lie in the St Gallen Abbey Library. Shep-en-Isis features in this edition's Focus article.

The St Gallen mummy is silent. But her silence is deafening due to the thorny questions that surround her. Why was Shep-en-Isis, a relic of ancient Egyptian culture, taken from her tomb on the Nile and shipped to St Gallen in the first place? Are we bothered by this? What if we repatriated her?

It remains to be seen how the story will end. In this context, it is ironic to note that the canton of St Gallen was once the victim of a cultural heist itself, when troops from Zurich stole a number of valuable artefacts at the beginning of the 18th century. A 300-year disagreement ensued between St Gallen and Zurich.

Incidentally, culture will be the central theme of the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in August 2023 – at a very apt venue: St Gallen.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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

**Swiss  
Community**

# Shep-en-Isis and the thorny question of repatriation

Cultural treasures give nations a sense of identity – which is why stolen cultural property is an emotive issue, not least with regard to the colonial empires of the past. Questions also surround cultural artefacts held in Switzerland. One controversy relates to the remains of an Egyptian mummy in St Gallen.

DENISE LACHAT

Amid the sumptuous baroque setting of the St Gallen Abbey Library, one of the world's oldest and most significant historical libraries, lies the Egyptian mummy Shep-en-Isis. As far as we know, Shep-en-Isis was a priest's daughter who died in the seventh century BC at the age of around 30. Her resting place, complete with glass coffin, is the "most beautiful mausoleum imaginable", according to the Abbey Library. But is it Shep-en-Isis's true resting place? This debate recently resurfaced when local theatre director Milo Rau won the Kulturpreis, St Gallen's most prestigious cultural award, in November 2022. In his acceptance speech, Rau announced that he would donate his 30,000 Swiss franc prize money towards helping return the mummy to Egypt. He staged an artistic stunt, creating a mock-up of the mummy in her coffin, which he proceeded to wheel through the city. The Shep-en-Isis exhibition is a "constant moral irritation", Rau lamented. He

and other signatories also penned the St Gallen Declaration for Shep-en-Isis, calling the exhibition "thoughtless" if not "predatory and disrespectful" as well as being unacceptable for a city of culture like St Gallen.

## Originally buried in Luxor

Shep-en-Isis is originally believed to have been buried in Egypt at the Theban Necropolis, across the Nile from Luxor. According to Rau and his fellow signatories, robbers snatched her from her grave. However, the Abbey Library says that this version of events cannot be proved. It argues in a statement on the St Gallen Declaration that it is inaccurate to claim Egypt was plundered in the 18th century. The Abbey Library says that instead French, British and, later, German scientists began to intensively study the culture of ancient Egypt after Napoleon's Egyptian campaign of 1798–99 – in complete contrast to the Egyptians themselves, who gave their

own heritage scant regard. The Abbey Library cites the example of Mohammed Ali, the viceroy of Egypt who in 1830 called one of the now world-famous pyramids of Giza a "pitiful heap", saying that he wanted to use the "rubble" to build canals. The then French consulate in Alexandria stepped in to prevent the pyramid's destruction, adds the statement.

## A question of dignity

Shep-en-Isis ended up in St Gallen around 200 years ago. Philipp Roux, a German businessman, is said to have purchased her remains in Alexandria along with two attendant wooden sarcophaguses. He then sent them to a friend, the politician Karl Müller-Friedberg, who was the founding father of the canton of St Gallen. It is not entirely clear whether Müller-Friedberg received the mummy as a gift or whether he bought it himself. After arriving in St Gallen, Shep-en-Isis was unwrapped down to the shoul-



ders by a group of invited scholars, according to accounts at the time. Following a ceremony, the guests were each allowed to take a piece of the mummy's bandages home with them. Was this the lack of respect to which Rau is referring? The German ethnologist Wiebke Ahrndt recently said that the social elites in the 19th century often held mummy "unwrapping parties", whereby mummies would be unwrapped for entertainment at private parties – not only in Europe, but in Egypt itself. This past could no longer be undone. Ahrndt, who has written a set of guidelines on caring for human remains in museums and collections, believes that mummies can be exhibited, provided human dignity and the sensitivities of the country of origin are respected. Not only do Egyptian museums also exhibit mummies, but it was even legal to export mummies until 1983, says Ahrndt. The people who run the Abbey Library are keen to stress that there is no voyeurism involved with

regard to Shep-en-Isis, and that they observe standard practice on the display of human remains at museums. Photos that they have provided to the media have even been taken from a distance, showing the mummy's face from a side-on angle.

Are these explanations sufficient to keep Shep-en-Isis in St Gallen? The

Catholic administration of the canton of St Gallen, the body that owns all the Abbey Library holdings, has responded to Rau's criticism and decided to re-examine the issue, it appears. Three weeks after Rau's stunt on the streets of St Gallen, the administration's management board said that it would "look seriously" into the

What Shep-en-Isis probably looked like – Italian forensic experts used computer tomography data to put together this forensic facial reconstruction of the mummy in early 2022. Photo: IMAGO

Theatre director Milo Rau wheeled a mock-up of Shep-en-Isis through St Gallen, calling for the mummy to be returned to her homeland.

Photo: Keystone





Shep-en-Isis in her glass coffin at the St Gallen Abbey Library. Every evening, the library staff honour her with an end-of-day ritual: they cover the coffin with a white veil and close the doors.

Photo: Keystone

possibility of returning Shep-en-Isis to her homeland, in consultation with the Egyptian authorities.

### Property plundered by the Nazis

In Switzerland, probes into the origin of foreign artistic and cultural property, referred to as provenance research, mainly relate to stolen Nazi gold and art from the Second World War. In 2002, a commission of experts headed by the historian Jean-François Bergier submitted a comprehensive report to the Federal Council detailing how Swiss firms cooperated closely with the Nazi regime. Artworks that changed hands during the

Nazi era in Germany (1933–1945) ended up in private and public collections. Finding out whether these artworks were looted by the Nazis is now imperative. The Berne Museum of Fine Arts, which accepted the Nazi-era trove of art dealer Cornelius Gurlitt in 2014, is leading by example in this regard.

The controversy surrounding Gurlitt proved to be a turning point, with the Federal Council subsequently deciding to set aside 500,000 Swiss francs every year to allow Swiss museums to carry out provenance research. A relatively small amount of money but at least it gets the ball rolling, says Joachim Sieber, who chairs the Swiss provenance research working group (SAP).

### Colonial legacy moving into political spotlight

Swiss provenance researchers must now wade through another weighty issue: cultural property derived from trade in the colonial era. This may seem paradoxical, given that Switzerland has never had any colonies. However, Switzerland “was and is part of Europe’s colonial conversation”, according to Sieber. Precisely because it was not a colonial power,

both Switzerland and its businesses were regarded as trustworthy partners by the new nations that achieved autonomy or outright independence from their European colonial rulers after 1945. Berne is slowly starting to revisit this legacy, as numerous parliamentary debates, motions and interventions have already shown, says Sieber, “even if this process is painful as it poses awkward questions with regard to Swiss neutrality and Switzerland’s view of itself as a nation built on equality, solidarity and humanitarianism”.

### Part of a worldwide debate

Various European countries are now wrestling with the implications of looted art from the colonial era. Some nations, like the Netherlands, have made official apologies. The Belgian and British royal families have expressed regret, but made no apology, for their respective countries’ past actions. Others have backed their words with actions. At the end of 2022, for example, Germany became the first nation to begin returning its Benin Bronzes to Nigeria. The Kingdom of Benin, in today’s Nigeria, was attacked by British colonial troops in

## Domestic spat over a globe

A domestic spat broke out in Switzerland almost 300 years after Zurich troops stole the 2.3-metre-high St Gallen Globe and a number of valuable manuscripts from the Abbey Library during the Toggenburg War of 1712. Many of the looted artefacts were returned under a peace treaty, but Zurich kept the globe for itself. Almost three centuries later, a legal squabble over who were the rightful owners of the globe almost ended up before the Federal Supreme Court. This was after the cantonal government of St Gallen expressed its grievance in 1996, demanding that Zurich return the globe. The federal government arbitrated

in the matter, and a typically Swiss compromise was eventually reached. Zurich was allowed to keep the original at the Swiss National Museum but had to produce a replica for St Gallen. When the replica was handed over in 2009, the National Museum, the St Gallen Abbey Library, and the Zurich Central Library also agreed to develop a joint digital version of the globe. Produced in collaboration with the Zurich University of the Arts, the digital globe has been available to view online since December 2022 ([www.3dglobus.ch](http://www.3dglobus.ch)). It seems that St Gallen and Zurich have finally buried the hatchet.

(DLA)



1897. Thousands of brass and bronze sculptures were plundered from its royal palace and traded as artworks, ending up in collections around the world. Nigeria now wants these items to be recognised as plundered art. It is less well known that Swiss museums also house 100 or so items suspected to have come from Benin. Eight Swiss museums have come together under the leadership of Zurich's Rietberg Museum to form the Swiss Benin Initiative (SBI). Funded by the Federal Office of Culture, the SBI seeks to ensure transparency for researchers as well as open dialogue with Nigeria. A key element in how we deal with cultural property is indeed dialogue. Speaking on French-language Swiss radio back in 2017 after French President Emmanuel Macron's pledge to return African treasures, the Geneva-based anthropologist and museologist Bansa Sigam stressed that the global north and south needed to become equal partners. Decolonisation meant "being honest with your own history and finding solutions". This could lead to the "common global history" advocated by Swiss historian Bernhard C. Schär, who believes it is a mistake to view and teach the history of Europe in isolation. History is always the result of interaction between people, he says.

### Repatriation is not the only solution

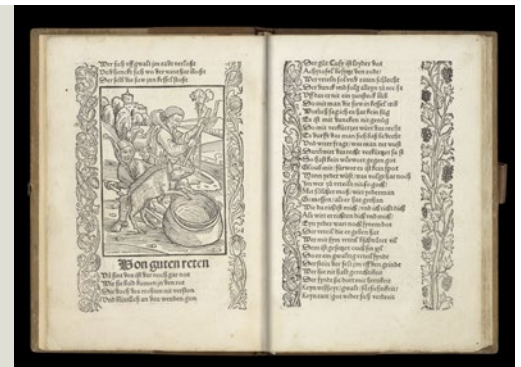
According to estimates, over 90 per cent of Africa's cultural heritage was looted during the colonial era and is currently held not in Africa but in Europe and the United States. Are all these treasures now to be returned? No, says Joachim Sieber, repatriation is not the only solution. For example, another option is for cultural property to be returned and then repurchased or loaned out on a long-term basis. Museums can also label exhibited artefacts with the names of their original owners. What matters, he adds, is finding a solution in consul-

According to the Federal Office of Culture, cultural property is a concrete witness of culture and history, holding a special place for the identity of the individual as well as the community as a whole. **It defines the self-image and social cohesion of a society.** This is why protecting cultural heritage today is one of the important duties of a state.

tation and cooperation with the countries of origin. To return to the original example in this article, there is, therefore, a distinct possibility that the Egyptian government will not even want Shep-en-Isis back and instead make an alternative amicable arrangement with the Catholic administration in St Gallen. In the meantime, Shep-en-Isis currently attracts some 150,000 visitors a year. Every evening, staff at the Abbey Library honour her with an end-of-day ritual. Once all visitors have left the building, they cover the glass coffin with a white veil and recite the mummy's name – an act of remembrance and a gesture of respect for the Egyptian concept of eternal life.

## Switzerland was also the victim of a cultural heist

Rich countries are the "usual suspects" when it comes to plundered art, but Switzerland itself was once the victim of a heist. The Capuchin friars of Fribourg have kept a beady eye on their valuable library for centuries but were evidently looking the other way when one of the books in their safekeeping, the "Ship of Fools" dating from the 15th century, was stolen during the Second World War. This exceptional work, dating back to the early days of the printing press, resurfaced in 1945 at a New York City book dealer. It was later gifted to one of the world's largest libraries, the Library of Congress in Washington. The friars were left empty-handed again in 1975, when a thief posing as a Vatican librarian made off with around 20 valuable old manuscripts. Like "Ship of Fools", these works disappeared and were forgotten – until the beginning of the 2000s, when an employee of the Fribourg Cantonal and University Library (KUB) found out the following: firstly, that the stolen manuscripts had been sold at auctions in Munich in 1975 and 1976, and secondly, that the missing copy of "Ship of Fools" had been lo-



Published in Basel in 1494 and illustrated with woodcuts, "Ship of Fools" by the humanist Sebastian Brant is an allegorical poem satirising the weaknesses and vices of the time.

cated in Washington. The KUB made subsequent enquiries to locate and recover the 20-odd stolen prints. At the end of 2022, the Library of Congress in Washington returned "Ship of Fools" to the canton of Fribourg. The book is now kept at the KUB, where it is available for students and scholars to view.

(DLA)

Further information (in German and French): [revue.link/narrenschiff](http://revue.link/narrenschiff)

## Justine Mettraux



Justine Mettraux is showing the rest of Switzerland that women are also capable of elite-level sailing. Since 15 January, the 36-year-old from Geneva has been participating in one of the epic events of team sailing: the Ocean Race. Six months at sea on an IMOCA, a 60-foot craft fitted with foils. In this round-the-world race over different legs, the organisers require each crew of five to include a woman. “It’s not just that Justine Mettraux has an outstanding level of expertise; the presence of a woman may also bring a more subtle approach to sailing,” is how an expert explained it. This Geneva native, born into a nautical family on Lake Geneva, leads a remarkable life – as do the rest of her family, since her two sisters and two brothers are all top-level sailors. “My father, who brought us up on his own, had complete confidence in us,” Justine recalls. And it certainly takes confidence to set out alone across the Atlantic, which is what Justine did in 2013, finishing second in the Mini Transat. During the last Route du Rhum, the Versoix sailor finished seventh with her IMOCA, after having led part of the way. The next step is the Vendée Globe in 2024, a solo race around the world where she will compete on an equal footing with her rivals because in a contest of this type, it is not a sailor’s strength that makes the difference, but rather their racing experience, knowledge of the sea, and boat-repairing skills. Justine possesses all of these assets. If she has a shortcoming, it is a certain reticence, perhaps, meaning she is not the type to pose on a beach with her boyfriend for a magazine cover. On the other hand, her passion and example are driving forces in making sailing more accessible to women.

STEPHANE HERZOG

### A setback for the Greens ahead of autumn’s national elections

Zurich voters elected a new parliament on 12 February 2023 – and their verdict is being seen as a barometer for the forthcoming elections to the National Council and the Council of States in autumn. This is because the Zurich vote very often reflects the national mood. The centre-right and right-wing parties have emerged from this year’s Zurich elections in a slightly stronger position. The SVP won an extra seat in the 180-seat cantonal parliament, consolidating its status as the strongest political party. The Centre party won three additional seats, while the FDP maintained the same number of seats. The Greens lost three, and the EVP and the Alternative Left lost one apiece. With the Green Liberals and the SP both gaining a seat however, the so-called “climate alliance” consisting of green and left-leaning parties and the EVP retained the parliamentary majority. The national elections take place on 22 October (more on page 24). (MUL)

### Questions over the composition of the Federal Council

The federal elections on 22 October are likely to reignite debate on the composition of the Federal Council, whose members represent a very stable bloc of the most popular political parties. This “magic formula” is not set in stone, with the Greens and Green Liberals now looking to participate in government due to their strong showing of recent years. A survey by the Sotomo research institute now shows that a clear majority of voters want the seven-strong Federal Council to have a different party-political composition. The SVP, FDP and SP each have two Federal Council seats and the Centre party one seat under the current formula. (MUL)

### Swiss munitions for Ukraine?

Switzerland does not export any weapons or ammunition to warring countries. It also prohibits other countries from passing on Swiss-manufactured war materiel. Germany would like to re-export Swiss-made munitions to Ukraine. So far, Switzerland has withheld its approval. However, the Security Policy Committee of the National Council now wants to loosen this blockade. In January, it suggested waiving the re-export ban, for example if weapons are to be sent to a conflict zone that the UN Security Council or two thirds of the UN General Assembly have condemned as violating international law. (MUL)

### A new regional nature park

Val Calanca (in the Italian-speaking part of Grisons) is to be the site of a new regional nature park, after four municipalities approved the project in January. This makes the small valley Switzerland’s first regional nature park south of the Alpine divide. A new big national park called Parc Adula was originally earmarked for the area but opposed by politicians. The new regional nature park is a remnant of the Adula project. Unlike nature reserves, regional nature parks are designed to protect flora and fauna in tandem with environmentally sustainable land use. (MUL)



# Mild winter eases energy fears

Europe's energy crisis also has implications for Switzerland. Thanks to mild temperatures and replenished reservoirs, the country was able to avert an emergency this winter. But the threat of power shortages remains.

THEODORA PETER

Last autumn, Switzerland was bracing itself for an uncomfortable winter of sparsely heated homes and dimly lit streets. The Federal Council was drawing up a contingency plan and urging the nation to save energy. In a worst case scenario, households would have to ration their consumption and companies shut down their operations.

This scenario was already looking unlikely by January – and had failed to materialise by the editorial deadline for this issue of “Swiss Review”. That was partly due to the weather. The first half of the winter was relatively mild throughout Europe. Switzerland basked in spring-like temper-

atures of up to 15°C over the festive period. Hazel bushes were already beginning to blossom by mid-January in lower-lying areas. People were heating their homes less, while European gas storage levels were higher than expected.

Furthermore, Swiss reservoirs were at higher-than-average levels following extensive autumn rainfall. Domestic hydropower is one of the keys to Swiss energy security. Power plant operators therefore set up a strategic hydropower reserve in their reservoirs to ensure they would still be in a position to generate at least 24 days of power by the beginning of spring.

Despite hydropower, Switzerland relies on imported electricity in the

winter months – including French nuclear power. The feared supply bottlenecks due to half of France's nuclear power stations being shut for maintenance in autumn never materialised, because most of these plants managed to get back online in time.

## Reserve power plants in case of an emergency

Back in summer 2022, the Federal Council approved the rapid construction of a reserve power plant in Birr (canton of Aargau) as a back-up in case of a power crunch. This facility is fitted out to operate with gas, oil or hydrogen. Its eight mobile turbines have a total output of 250 megawatts, which is enough to power around 400,000 households. The plant has been operational since the end of February and will remain in place until 2026, if necessary. The existing thermal power plant in Cornaux (canton of Neuchâtel) can produce an additional 36 megawatts, if need be.

There are no power shortages yet, but neither has the government given the all-clear. The situation is likely to be more challenging next winter, say experts. Gas storage facilities were still being replenished with Russian supplies last year, but sanctions in connection with the war in Ukraine mean that Europe can no longer rely on Russian gas. The search for alternative energy sources is ultimately a race against time.

The emergency power plant in Birr – hurriedly approved and rapidly built, it can supply 400,000 households with electricity if need be.  
Photo: Keystone



Current energy consumption in Switzerland:  
[revue.link/dashboard](https://revue.link/dashboard)

## Chur diocese purges the exorcist

Until a few years ago, the diocese of Chur had its own bona fide exorcist who purged the faithful of their supposed demons. The exorcist recently died – and now the controversial post will remain empty. People in emotional, spiritual or psychological distress should seek conventional therapies, says the diocese’s new bishop.

SUSANNE WENGER

Exorcism rids people of evil and cleanses them of their inner demons, say those who believe in it. Even today, this spiritual practice still has a following. Vicar-General Christoph Casetti performed the role of exorcist in the diocese of Chur – until his death in 2020. Chur has now decided not to fill the vacant exorcist post, it was announced at the end of last year. “We are all human, with our own strengths and weaknesses,” Bishop of Chur Joseph Maria Bonnemain explained in an interview on Swiss radio. There were “normal ways to treat people in distress – medical, psychological and psychotherapeutic”, he added. There was no need to go looking for “occult causes”.

Based in the cantonal capital of Grisons, Chur is a diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, one of Switzerland’s three official churches. Pope Francis appointed Bonnemain, 74, as Chur’s new bishop two years ago. Bonnemain is a trained physician who studied medicine before moving into the field of theology. During his time as a priest, he worked as a hospital chaplain in the canton of Zurich. Throughout his entire clerical career, he had never met anyone whom he thought required a major exorcism, he said in his radio interview. People with emotional, spiritual or psychological burdens needed “support, prayer or appropriate church services, but not necessarily an exorcism”.

### Holy water and crucifixes

By abolishing the office of exorcist, the new bishop has discontinued a service for which Chur had been widely known. Commentators say the move is linked to tensions that have been bubbling for over 30 years



Christoph Casetti († 2020) served in the diocese of Chur for a long time as “Switzerland’s best-known exorcist”. He was the last-ever clergyman to hold the office of exorcist in Chur. Photo: Keystone

between conservatives and reformers within the diocese. Two of Bonnemain’s predecessors, bishops Wolfgang Haas (1988 to 1997) and Vitus Huonder (2007 to 2019), were arch-conservatives and controversial figures. The current bishop is regarded as quite broad-minded and open to dialogue. It is thought that

Rome appointed him with the mandate of healing divisions among the almost 700,000 Catholics in the diocese, which comprises the Zurich area in addition to rural cantons.

Exorcism, both “minor” and “major”, has a long tradition in the Catholic Church. Minor exorcism consists of prayers, while major exorcism is a

rite that dates back to the 17th century. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, exorcisms are aimed at the “expulsion of demons” and “deliverance from demonic possession”. Besides prayer, the rite involves the use of holy water and crucifixes. In Switzerland, minor exorcisms have always been more common than major exorcisms. The latter may only be performed by a bishop or a priest who has obtained the special and express permission of the diocesan bishop. Christoph Casetti was the most senior exorcist in the diocese of Chur. His obituary mentioned the fact that he had carried out the role officially since 2014, in addition to other offices.



By deciding to abolish the office of exorcist, Chur's bishop Joseph M. Bonnemain has departed from the course of his arch-conservative predecessors.

Photo: Keystone

## Criticism

A German radio station once referred to Casetti as “Switzerland’s best-known exorcist”. Casetti himself often defended the concept of exorcism from criticism both inside and outside the church from people who said that the practice was reactionary. Invoking the devil has always been a means for arch-conservatives to enforce their controlling, archaic brand of Catholicism, said a Lucerne-based theologian on Swiss television in 2017. Psychiatric specialists warned that there was a risk of worshippers refusing proven therapies to treat mental illness.

Casetti did not agree. A priest may only begin to consider exorcism once they can ascertain that the person in question is not merely suffering from an ailment, he explained. Casetti also rejected the “archaic” label. Exorcisms of “demonic powers” have been necessary throughout history, he said, adding that Jesus himself was a “healer and deliverer”. He claimed that he received dozens of

inquiries from people every month who thought they were possessed by evil spirits. And these inquiries not only came from within the diocese – many people from Germany contacted him too.

## Experts welcome abolition

According to religious expert Georg Schmid, the diocese of Chur was a magnet for people in the German-speaking world who were looking for an exorcist. He once called Chur an “exorcism hot spot”. Schmid runs the Relinfo centre near Zurich, which advises people of all faiths. In Relinfo’s view, Chur officially calling time on exorcism is to be welcomed. “In our experience, people who believe they are plagued by evil spirits and turn to the church for help are much better off receiving spiritual guidance than any sort of exorcism.”

Relinfo has been fielding an increasing number of inquiries in recent years regarding exorcism – or “deliverance”, as the practice is also called. Schmid says this increase is partially down to immigration from

countries in which people have an ingrained belief in evil spirits. However, Pentecostal/Charismatic churches in Switzerland also perform deliverances, as does a Salvation Army officer in the canton of Zurich, whose services have become very popular. The practice of expelling evil spirits, known as “ruqya”, plays a role in some forms of Islam. People also perform ruqya in Switzerland, according to Schmid. Then there is the boom in esoteric and neo-shamanic rituals aimed at driving evil spirits from people’s homes, he adds.

## No monopoly

It is not uncommon for people to try out these services one after the other. “This does not say much about their effectiveness,” says Schmid. The Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland clearly has no monopoly on exorcisms, which are now no longer available in Chur. The diocese of Lausanne, Geneva and Fribourg and the diocese of Basel still perform deliverances. Two exorcists appointed by the bishop carry out this service in French-speaking Switzerland, while Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus Martin Gächter holds the post in Basel. Both dioceses are keen to stress that they work closely with psychiatrists. Gächter told the kath.ch news site that he essentially listens to people who come to him and then says a prayer for them. Only once in 30 years has he ever had to perform a major exorcism. A woman was possessed, and it took 15 sessions to deliver her.



Dawid Burliuk:  
Winter in the city. Undated.  
Oil on canvas



Kliment Redko:  
Kyivo-Pecherska Lavra. 1914.  
Oil on canvas.



Yuliy Klever (Julius von Klever):  
Winter sunset. 1885.  
Oil on canvas

Wilhelm Kotarbinski:  
At the altar. Undated.  
Oil on canvas.





Zinaida Serebriakova: Self portrait. 1923–24. Oil on canvas.



## Ukrainian art in Swiss exile

Russia's war against Ukraine has put Ukraine's cultural property at risk. Home to over 14,000 exhibits from the 13th to the 21st century, the Kyiv National Art Gallery is one of Ukraine's oldest and best-known art museums. A lack of sufficient safe storage space in the context of the ongoing invasion prompted Kyiv National Art Gallery representatives to look for museums abroad that would shelter selections from their outstanding collection. Around 100 paintings from Ukraine have now found a temporary home in Switzerland – at the Kunstmuseum in Basel and Musée Rath in Geneva. Both of these museums have their own distinctive exhibitions dedicated to around 50 of these works each.

The "Born in Ukraine" exhibition in Basel showcases works by various Ukrainian-born artists. It also pays homage to the distinctive history of the Kyiv National Art Gallery, known as the Kyiv Museum of Russian Art when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union. Since 2014, the Kyiv museum has been engaged in a critical review

and scholarly examination of its own collection, calling into question the idea of Russian art as an ostensibly homogeneous body of cultural assets.

Meanwhile, Musée Rath in Geneva is presenting part of an exhibition that was on display in Kyiv in 2022 to mark the Kyiv National Art Gallery's 100th anniversary. Entitled "Du crépuscule à l'aube" (From Dusk to Dawn), it showcases Ukrainian artworks with a night-time theme devoted to the contrasts between darkness and light.

THEODORA PETER

"Born in Ukraine" at the Kunstmuseum in Basel. Until 30 April 2023. [www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/en](http://www.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/en)

"Du crépuscule à l'aube" at Musée Rath in Geneva. Until 23 April 2023. [revue.link/rath](http://revue.link/rath)

# The wood magician and his amazing strip of paper

How a tiny battery made in Switzerland ended up on the list of the world's best inventions.

DÖLF BARBEN

What is it? To be honest, it looks a bit underwhelming. Like something a child has stuck together: a small cut-out figure with a dark coat and two tiny antennas.

Reality tells a different story. What resembles a scrap of paper is in fact a battery that was invented and developed in Switzerland, at the Swiss Federal Laboratories for Materials Science and Technology, Empa – an object so remarkable that it made it on to the 2022 list of the world's best inventions.

Published annually by the US magazine "Time", the Best Inventions list honours "200 innovations changing



Higher, farther, faster, more beautiful? In search of somewhat unconventional Swiss records  
**This edition: The new biodegradable paper battery**

how we live", as the jury puts it. The list covers all manner of inventions. These include a smart water sprinkler, a heat-free hairdryer, a powerful smartphone microscope, and the James Webb Space Telescope. And hidden away in the "Experimental" category? The small, inconspicuous and slightly tatty-looking Swiss paper battery.

You can tell how well Empa's invention was received, because the jury chose not to group it together with the technical gadgets – like the streaming headphones that you can wear underwater, or the on-the-go baby bottle warmer. Nor did they list it under the fun stuff like the indoor

garden for beginners or the teddy bear that hugs back.

Like the Covid breathalyser test and the new NASA space rocket, the paper battery was one of the few innovations referred to by the jury as "breakthrough" inventions.

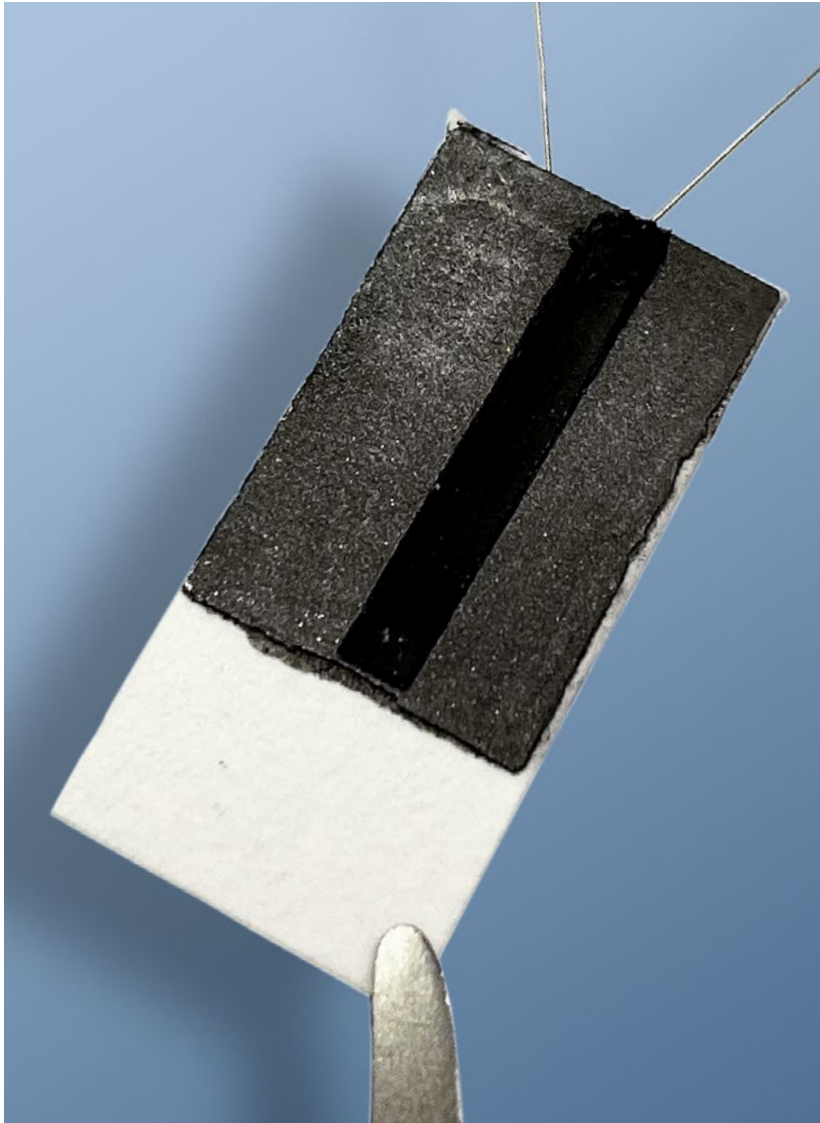
A sliver of paper mentioned in the same breath as a space rocket – remarkable. As the "Time" magazine website says, the paper battery is an invention aimed at reducing e-waste. Not only is the paper biodegradable, but so are the battery's other components. Hence the battery is not just a breakthrough – but an environmental breakthrough.

Gustav Nyström and his team created it. The Swedish-born Nyström has headed the Cellulose & Wood Materials Laboratory at Empa since 2018. Cellulose is the main substance in the wall of plant cells and, like wood, a sustainable biomaterial.

Nyström studied the conductive qualities of natural materials for his PhD. This was how he soon came up with the idea of a biodegradable electricity storage device. He found the ideal work environment at Empa "because renewable and sustainable materials and solutions inform everything we do here", he says. The title of an article dedicated to Nyström on the Empa website refers to him as the "wood magician".

Certainly, Empa is no longer simply the "Building Materials Testing Institute", as it was initially called when it was founded in 1880. In recent decades, the organisation has developed into a multi-branch research hub. It sees its core mission as carrying out solution-oriented research – for industry, but also for society.

Nyström himself is keen to stress the social dimension more than anything else. Although he is a physicist, he talks more like an environmental scientist. He will happily explain how



It looks a bit like a piece of cobbled-together handicraft (held here in a pair of tweezers) but was named one of the world's best inventions in 2022.

Photo: Empa

the paper battery works (see box below), but soon starts emphasising the “bigger picture”, the potential ways in which the battery can be used, and how we can protect the environment. Nyström, 41, has three children. He wants his work, “above all, to contribute to a better future”, he says.

The paper battery is not a particularly powerful battery, nor does it have to be. There are now a wide range of small disposable electronic devices that run on very little power. These can be medical diagnostic devices, for example, or battery-powered smart parcel boxes that enable delivery tracking and even allow the temperature of sensitive items such as vaccines to be monitored during transit.

### Water as the trigger

The Empa battery is made of a small strip of paper on which three different inks are printed. The ink on the front contains graphite flakes and acts as the positive end of the battery, while the ink on the back contains zinc powder and acts as the negative terminal. A third, special ink is printed on both sides of the paper, on top of the other two inks. Salt is dispersed throughout the strip of paper. Ingeniously, you activate the battery with water. One drop is enough. As soon as the paper is wet, the salts within the paper dissolve and the battery charge is released. But if the paper remains dry, the battery retains its charge. There is one disadvantage: the battery will only work for as long as it is wet. Tests show that it can keep a low-power alarm clock running for about one hour before it dries. Although pressure, heat or an external electromagnetic field could conceivably also be used as a battery trigger.

(DB)



Nyström also sees potential in wearables, which are any technology designed to be worn for the purpose of monitoring things like heart rate or blood sugar. Furthermore, paper batteries would be more or less ideal for use in outdoor measuring devices. If for whatever reason the batteries were never retrieved, they would eventually decompose anyway.

Like the latest NASA space rocket, are we also about to see the stratospheric rise of the paper battery? Some companies have already expressed an interest, says Nyström, but whether anything comes of it

Researcher and inventor Gustav Nyström believes in the bigger picture: “protecting the environment”. Photo: Empa

Good for compost: Empa has also developed a capacitor, which disintegrates after two months buried in the soil, leaving only a few carbon particles. The new paper battery decomposes in much the same way. Photo: Gian Vaitl / Empa

remains to be seen, he adds. Yet what we do know is that he and his team will carry on researching. Their paper biodegradable supercapacitor is already at a very advanced stage of development. They also have an idea along the lines of a display system. “We see many exciting possibilities.”

All that remains is to ask the inventor which other inventions on the “Time” magazine list he finds intriguing. Nyström is true to form in his response. He doesn’t mention the “chameleon car” that can change colour, or the AI system that can create images and art. The inventions that Nyström describes as “particularly interesting” relate to sustainability – like the devices and methods that have been pioneered to help remove CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere.

Video: [revue.link/empa](https://revue.link/empa)





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# Art – in a roundabout way

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## 3,000

Over 3,000 roundabouts ensure that traffic runs smoothly in Switzerland. But the artistic installations in the middle of these roundabouts are often an acquired taste, to put it mildly. “Kreiselkunst” (literally “roundabout art”) has become an ironic term in German. But there is hope. Many of the older roundabouts are now being dismantled – as are the “interesting” installations that accompany them.

## 127

The Swiss like to pat themselves on the back for being prolific recyclers. But could recycling a lot simply mean you are consuming too much? According to the marine conservation organisation Oceancare, Switzerland has a significant plastic problem. Annual per capita plastic consumption stands at 127 kg – a European record – of which 95 kg is, incidentally, not recycled.

## 90,000,000,000

Plastic waste is a shameful legacy. The more conventional legacy we leave to our loved ones is less likely to end up in the landfill. Some 90 billion Swiss francs is bequeathed from one generation to the next every year in Switzerland (2020). An enormous amount of money. Half of all personal monetary assets in Switzerland are not earned but inherited. Although many people inherit nothing at all.



## 450,000,000,000

Switzerland has another hidden source of immense wealth. All the underground pipelines for water, sewage, electricity, gas, and district heating in Switzerland have a total physical value of 450 billion Swiss francs, according to recent estimates. The government now intends to keep a closer eye on these assets and put together a national inventory.

## 55

You can measure and quantify almost anything – including hope. According to the latest University of St Gallen “hope barometer” survey of the Swiss population (2022), a majority of just over 55 per cent say they are satisfied and hopeful at least in relation to their own personal lives. Hope increases as people move up the age groups, with 18- to 29-year-olds being the least optimistic.

FIGURES COMPILED BY MARC LETTAU

# L'express da linguas

## The breakneck language

Languages are in constant flux, picking up new vocabulary along the way. Switzerland's minority language, Romansh, is evolving particularly rapidly. Sometimes overnight.

JÜRIG STEINER

How does the vocabulary of a minority language spoken by relatively few people stay up to date? Can it evolve quickly enough? "Yes, it can," says linguist Daniel Telli. "But you need to help it along." He knows what he is talking about. Telli is head of language at Lia Rumantscha, an organisation that promotes the Romansh language and culture from its headquarters in Chur.

Romansh is a minority language composed of various regional dialects and vernaculars. According to the Federal Statistical Office, 40,000 people say that it is the language of which they have the best command. Around 60,000 people speak it. "But it would be a fallacy to think that a language is less effective simply because relatively few people use it," says Telli. Just like German, French and English, Romansh is a language that covers the entire human condition – from the sexual to the major social, political, economic and scientific issues of today. If it didn't, it would probably not survive.

Chasa (house), fanestra (window), isch da lain (wooden door), balcun tort (bay window) – local words for this splendid house facade in Grisons.

Contemporary, abstract concepts are a little trickier to convey in Romansh.

Photo: Keystone

A language's ability to evolve is an important indicator of how future-proof it is. How do you create new words to reflect an ever-changing world? German, spoken as a native language by over 100 million people, relies on a number of authoritative sources in this regard. One of them is the Duden, the standard dictionary and pre-eminent language resource of the German language. Its latest edition, which was published in 2020, included 3,000 new words and expressions in addition to around 145,000 existing entries.

The Mannheim-based Leibniz Institute for the German Language (IDS) maintains an online vocabulary information system called OWID that includes a dictionary of neologisms, i.e. newly coined words and expressions. In the past ten years, OWID has taken on around 2,000 new words or new meanings for existing words. The IDS also has its eye on a few hundred potential new entries such as "netflixen", "Bodypositivity" and "1,5-Grad-Ziel" (1.5°C target), with a view to these terms possibly entering official German usage. Other major languages have a similar procedure.

### The big dictionary

Lia Rumantscha in Chur, on the other hand, favours a more pragmatic and faster approach. Its key resource for updating Romansh vocabulary is the "Pledari Grond", or



“Crear plets en rumantsch n’è betg in’activitad academica lunsch davent da la realitad. Igl è impurtant che nossas utilisadras e noss utilisaders possian sa participar directamain al Pledari Grond e gidar uschia ad actualisar la lingua. Quai rinforza il sentiment che la lingua appartegna a tuttas e tuts che la dovran.

Il rumantsch na duai betg daventar ina lingua artificziala, mabain sto restar francà en il mintgadi modern che sa mida cuntinuadamain.”

Did you understand that? If your Romansh is a little rusty, you can find the translation on page 31.

in English: the big dictionary. The “Pledari Grond” is an online dictionary covering Rumantsch Grischun (the standard written language) and the five Romansh dialects. Rumantsch Grischun currently accounts for just under 250,000 entries in the “Pledari Grond” – a copious body of vocabulary compared to the Duden, for example.

Telli and his team of linguists add new entries to the “Pledari Grond” practically every day, frequently based on outside input. On the “Pledari Grond” website, any user can enter the German equivalent of a missing Romansh word – and then suggest their own Romansh translation. Any one of Telli’s team who happens to be at the keyboard will then look at the suggested entry immediately. Telli: “Whoever is on duty on any given day should be ready for some surprising teasers.”

### From granary to computer

Very often, the people who use the “Pledari Grond” are journalists who provide content in Romansh, says Telli. If they are unable to find a specific term, they will ask for advice. “They usually need an answer before their editorial deadline a few hours later. We can normally help them in time.”

Like the schoolyard, the media is an important environment for new vocabulary, because journalists are always trying to find simple expressions for new concepts, he says. The Covid crisis (“crisa da corona”) provided a particularly fertile ground for new terms – from “infecziun postvaccina” (breakthrough infection) to “obligatori da certificat” (mandatory Covid passports).

Despite the time pressure, Telli and his team aim to provide the best stand-alone yet logical solutions. The traditional Romansh word for a granary, “arcun”, is a great example, says Telli. This noun now has a second meaning: computer memory. The verb “arcunar” means saving a file.

### Complex gender neutrality

For Telli, the work that they do at Lia Rumantscha is anything but highbrow. “It is important that users can play their part in evolving our language,” he says. “This reinforces the sense that Romansh belongs to everyone who uses it.” Romansh must never sink into oblivion as a twee artificial language, but should live and breathe to reflect the fast pace of our modern times. The “Pledari Grond” is a suitably agile interface and a crucial enabler, he adds.

Pragmatism is another key factor. For example, Romansh speakers are happy to appropriate English expressions if they have to, with terms like “googlar” (to Google) an integral part of their vocabulary.

Things become somewhat more complex with regard to gender neutrality. This is because, unlike, say, German, the masculine and the feminine have different plural articles: “ils”/“las”. Hence, Lia Rumantscha and other similar Romansh-oriented bodies limit gender-neutral usage to situations involving a diverse audience.

Link: [pledarigrond.ch](http://pledarigrond.ch)



Daniel Telli and his team of linguists add new entries to the “Pledari Grond” Romansh online dictionary practically every day. Photo supplied

## Romansh

Since the Federal Constitution was amended in 1938, Romansh has been Switzerland’s fourth official language. It is composed of five regional dialects (Puter in Upper Engadine; Vallader in Lower Engadine and the Val Müstair; Sursilvan in the Surselva area of the Anterior Rhine Valley; Sutsilvan mainly in the Schams Valley; Surmiran in the Albula and Vaz/Obervez area) as well as numerous local vernaculars. Besides dialects, Rumantsch Grischun is the unified written language, based mainly on three dialects: Sursilvan, Surmiran and Vallader. Teaching material is published in Rumantsch Grischun and in all of the dialects, because both Rumantsch Grischun and the dialects are regarded as languages of literacy and instruction. The “Pledari Grond” also provides dictionaries for the Surmiran, Sutsilvan, Sursilvan, Puter and Vallader dialects. All people who speak Romansh speak at least one other language – and that is German.

(JS)

# Railway station novels

Railway stations are the coincidental, inconspicuous thread that runs through Franz Hohler's trio of novels, "Es klopft", "Gleis 4" and "Das Päckchen".



Franz Hohler

CHARLES LINSMAYER

Franz Hohler toured with his cello for decades, his solo variety performances charming audiences with a seamless mixture of literature, satire, humour and music. Hohler is back on the road in 2023 – not as a variety entertainer, but as a writer and author performing a "Spaziergang durch sein Gesamtwerk", or stroll through his life's work, to mark his 80th birthday. It is easy to forget what a brilliant novelist Hohler still is, having penned such books as "Wegwerfgeschichten" (Throwaway stories), the cleverly narrated "Die Rückeroberung" (The recapture), and the irrepressible "Totemügerli" (a series of stories spoken in Bernese dialect). Hohler has a new treat in store for us: "Bahnhofsromane" (Railway station novels) – a 640-page book containing a trio of novels that were published between 2007 and 2017.

## A coincidental thread

With surprising and often barely plausible narratives, "Es klopft" (Someone is knocking), "Gleis 4" (Platform 4) and "Das Päckchen" (The package) are three novels that not only prove that "nothing is as improbable as to be impossible", as Hohler asserted in a collection of short stories in 2008, but also illustrate Hohler's ability to link stories along a random thread. And nothing could be more random than a railway station – one in Basel, one in Zurich, and one in Berne. The humble "Bahnhof" binds the three novels together, albeit as nothing more than a coincidental place that people pass through.

## Glimpse behind the facade

In "Es klopft" (2007), an unknown woman at Basel station knocks on the window of a train on which ENT spe-

cialist Manuel Ritter is returning to Zurich after a conference. Ritter has no idea what the woman wants. However, the same woman appears in his practice days later and manages to get him to father her child. The unbelievable situations that arise from this curious encounter not only develop into an exciting whodunnit, but also give the reader an evocative glimpse behind the facade of a well-to-do middle class family on the so-

"The story about the medieval manuscript is about respecting that particular age in history. It's a leitmotif to which I always return. Many things that happen nowadays are linked to earlier events that none of us have experienced. For example, Kim Jong-un fired a rocket over Japan on the same date on which Japan invaded Korea in 1910. My book settles a very old score. We are probably all a little too ensconced in our neatly arranged, computerised, train-schedule lives."

Franz Hohler talking about "Das Päckchen" in 2017

called Gold Coast overlooking Lake Zurich.

## Suffering and discrimination

"Gleis 4" (2013) begins with geriatric nurse Isabelle accidentally witnessing the sudden death of an unknown passer-by at Oerlikon station. Featuring a thrilling crime narrative that extends all the way to Canada, the book addresses the scandal of "contract children" who were used as cheap labour on farms and in homes in Switzerland from the 1850s to the second half of the 20th century, as well as the problem of discrimination against people of Afro-European background.

## A homage to writing

Last but not least, "Das Päckchen" (2017) begins with a peculiar call inside a phone box at Berne station. The interlocutors talk about a mysterious medieval manuscript. Their conversation meanders somewhat into the area of mountaineering, but then returns to the Middle Ages. In a world of monastic friars, scribes, copyists, itinerant scholars, and nuns, a tender love story is played out – one of the loveliest that Hohler has ever written. Hohler's message? That books are a unique and indispensable part of our cultural heritage. That the diverse, inexhaustible range of literature in all its creative, inventive forms will always win out over films, computer games and other media. With his varied body of work, Franz Hohler, one of Switzerland's most brilliant, popular writers, has epitomised this basic truth all his life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Franz Hohler; "Die Bahnhofsromane", btb-Taschenbuch, ISBN 978-2-442-77299-5, Frankfurt 2022

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST BASED IN ZURICH

## An egocentric freedom



CAROLIN AMLINGER,  
OLIVER NACHTWEY  
"Gekränkte Freiheit.  
Aspekte des libertären  
Autoritarismus"  
available in German only;  
Suhrkamp Verlag, 2022.  
480 pages, CHF 42.90 /  
e-book: CHF 30

"No to Bill Gates!" "No to forced vaccination!" "We want freedom from the Covid dictatorship!" Slogans like these, influenced by conspiracy theory, were heard in Switzerland at anti-Covid rallies in 2020 and 2021. As in other countries, the marches attracted a mixed crowd – from ageing hippies, yoga teachers and local green alternative-left politicians, to self-styled nation-loving libertarians and the avowed far right.

On the back of the pandemic arose the "Querdenker" movement, a protest group that defies conventional political categorisation. Many who took part in the demonstrations identify as "Querdenker" (literally "lateral thinkers"). Not only do they vehemently oppose government policy on Covid, but they also dissent on other matters like the Russia-Ukraine war and climate change. They dismiss the "mainstream media" and rail

against the scientific community and the shadowy "elite" (governments and multinationals) who supposedly control us. "Querdenker" view themselves as the enlightened ones. The rest of us are docile sheep for wearing masks and getting vaccinated.

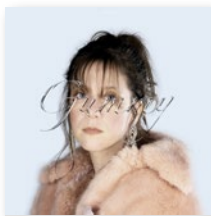
How should we interpret this movement? Sociologist of literature, Carolin Amlinger, and sociologist professor Oliver Nachtwey, both of whom lecture at the University of Basel, searched for answers while the pandemic was still ongoing. In a study entitled "Gekränkte Freiheit" (Offended freedom), which they published at the end of 2022, Amlinger and Nachtwey surveyed over a thousand "Querdenker" in Germany and Switzerland, a dozen of whom they interviewed at length. They witnessed anti-Covid demos first hand and monitored social media, coming to the conclusion that what we are seeing is "libertarian authoritarianism".

Not that the "Querdenker" cling to any leader. "If anything, many of them tend to be anti-authoritarian in outlook," Amlinger and Nachtwey write. Their individual freedoms are non-negotiable, on the other hand. And they defend these with strong-arming, "anti-authoritarian authoritarian" aggression. Unlike other freedom fighters, continue the authors, "Querdenker" view freedom not as a shared social condition but as a form of individual self-realisation without social responsibility.

According to Amlinger and Nachtwey, theirs is an egocentric freedom. When the promise of individual self-realisation is unfulfilled, this harbours potential for offence that can turn into frustration, resentment and a sense of impotence. What can we do to prevent people from repudiating society in this way? Freedom needs to be seen and conveyed "as being something profoundly social", this insightful book concludes.

SUSANNE WENGER

## Electropop – dreamy, experimental and flowing



ANNA AARON  
"Gummy"  
Hummus Records, 2022  
[www.annaaron.com](http://www.annaaron.com)

The title evokes gummy bear sweets and the album cover is pastel coloured. But the music is like a stream of water: slightly choppy now and again, meandering at the edges, but always flowing in one direction. "Gummy" is Anna Aaron's sixth record since 2011. And like the two albums that preceded it, it is the result of a fruitful collaboration with the legendary Young Gods drummer Bernard Trontin. Guitarist Nicolas Büttiker was also involved.

Aaron, who is 38 years old and comes from Basel, recorded "Gummy" in her own studio as well as in the same Alpine chalet in which she and Trontin produced the ambient track "Moonwaves". This unlikely musical alliance with Trontin has culminated in an album filled at once with inviting warmth and oppressive background tones. It is an eclectic sound, but it arguably works. In any case,

it is brave and surprising in its experimental moments.

Aaron's vocals are as dreamy and fragile as usual, revealing multiple layers of complexity here and there. "Gummy" is a break-up album. The lyrics explore the later stages of a broken heart – "the moment when you have already begun to meet new people and regain your emotional space", says the singer, whose real name is Cécile Meyer, on her website. Synthesisers, a bubbling bassline and Trontin's prevalent drums provide the backdrop.

The luxuriant undercurrent and incisive rhythms of Aaron's electropop are reminiscent of 1990s trip-hop in places – without sounding outdated or old-fashioned. Other moments recall the electronic music of much earlier days.

These elements combined feel effortless and joined up. The instrumentals, which feature the extended "Birthday" and the concluding title track – are particularly mesmerising, incorporating layers of hypnotic repetition. Then there is a sudden whiff of 1970s krautrock.

"Gummy" is a most interesting and pleasurable journey through the Aaron-Trontin musical cosmos. It is a record in constant flux. A stream of sounds and moods, carried along by some unashamedly good pop melodies.

MARKO LEHTINEN

## Smoking among the young: Switzerland lags behind

Switzerland is currently at the bottom of the European ranking in the fight against smoking. An initiative banning advertising aimed at minors was approved in 2022. Prevention is now facing off against the might of Big Tobacco.



STÉPHANE HERZOG

“This is a significant improvement.” Camille Robert, co-director of the “Groupement romand d’études des addictions” (GREAA) network, recalls her sense of satisfaction when the popular initiative “Yes to protecting children and young adults from tobacco advertising” was accepted in February 2022. This constitutional article should come into force in 2024. The Federal Council has announced that “it will result in an almost total ban on advertising, since there are few places or media which minors cannot access”. These provisions will be incorporated into the tobacco products act.

Launched in 2015, it aims to regulate a wide variety of products, all of which serve to deliver nicotine to consumers, e.g. cigarettes, heated tobacco, e-cigarettes, tobacco placed between the gums (snuff/snus), nicotine substitutes.

Despite this progress, prevention groups remain wary. “Whereas the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a total ban on advertising, Swiss law stipulates a list of certain bans on advertising and sponsorship, which will leave space for the tobacco companies,” comments Vanessa Prince, project manager at Unisanté (VD). Pascal Diethelm, presi-

dent of the OxySuisse association, also sees a major flaw. “By focusing attention on the under-18 group, this law risks reinforcing tobacco’s appeal among young people as forbidden fruit”. As an example, he refers to a booth set up at the last Montreux Festival by British American Tobacco, reserved solely for adults. “It’s exclusive, and that attracts young people,” he adds. Such messages normalising tobacco use can be found on social networks. “Smoking is a juvenile disease that is being transmitted through social networks on a wide scale,” states Swiss physician Reto Auer, who works with Unisanté. According to

Photo: Keystone

prevention associations, the best way to protect young people from tobacco would be to ban advertising completely, as recommended by the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Although Switzerland signed the convention in 2004, its ratification is not on the agenda at the moment.

## An empire of multinational tobacco companies

The might of the tobacco industry in Switzerland is contributing to this reticence. The country is home to Philip Morris (PMI), Japan Tobacco International and British American Tobacco Switzerland. PMI alone manufactures over 20 billion cigarettes a year in Neuchâtel, including small cigarettes for its IQOS heated tobacco device. “The tobacco industry has managed to form alliances with the economy and the most conservative parties,” Diethelm explains. An SVP national councillor – Raymond Clottu (NE) – declared in 2016, for example, that “cigarette advertising is not intended to encourage smoking, it’s simply an instrument of legitimate competition between markets”.

Ultimately, Switzerland was ranked 35th in the Tobacco Control Scale 2021 in Europe, second-to-last before Bosnia-Herzegovina. Its score was 35 points, compared with 82 for Ireland, which received good marks in eight areas, including increased prices for a packet of cigarettes and measures to ban smoking in public spaces. With regard to advertising, countries such as Finland and Norway, which have a complete ban on advertising, were awarded the maximum number of points (13), while Switzerland received two points. “In some countries, cigarette packs are very plain and not even visible at the point of sale, which lessens marketing appeal,” says the president of OxySuisse. What effects will the impending law on tobacco products have on this aspect of pre-



vention? “Switzerland could achieve around ten points, but not the maximum because there will still be forms of advertising permitted for those over 18,” acknowledges Jean-Paul Humair, medical director of the Centre for Information and Prevention of Tobacco Use in Geneva.

## Limited prevention

Prevention organisations are looking for a law that goes further. In particular, they deplore the fact that Switzerland has only one global health survey, carried out just once every five years. The prevalence of smoking – and vaping – among young people should, however, be monitored much more closely. In a survey of upper secondary school students in 2020 and 2021, 12 percent of 15-18-year-olds said they smoked every day and 2 percent vaped daily. Although age comparisons with other countries are complicated, overall the fact remains that 27 percent of the Swiss population smokes, compared with about 15 percent in Australia, where the battle against tobacco use is very aggressive.

## ...and cheap packet prices

Another prevention tool is to increase the price per cigarette pack, which leads to an equivalent reduction in consumption by young people, states Humair. According to the latest

New forms of consumption beg the question: what needs preventing – nicotine consumption in general, or just smoking? This lack of clarity undermines prevention efforts.

Photo: Keystone

report by the Federal Commission for Issues relating to Addiction and the Prevention of Non-communicable Diseases, the price of cigarettes is abnormally low in Switzerland compared with other countries. A packet costs CHF 9 in Switzerland as against CHF 15 in Ireland. Each pack sold generates CHF 4.60 for the OASI pension fund, 2.6 centimes for the Tobacco Control Fund and the same amount for the fund promoting tobacco cultivation. “The tax charged for OASI poses a problem of social justice, because it forces people to contribute even though not all will benefit from it due to diseases caused by tobacco,” explains Camille Robert. This issue is not covered by the bill.

## Nicotine debate undermining prevention

GREA also believes that anti-smoking campaigns are under-resourced. “They have little impact on young people in general. Actions aimed at supply and demand or helping young people understand the mechanisms used in advertising are more effective,” comments Jean-Paul Humair. Unisanté accomplishes this with a tablet app that encourages teenagers to discover advertising messages hidden in images presented in the form of an Instagram feed.

The debate on cigarettes is intertwined with a second debate concerning access to nicotine. And this issue divides prevention professionals into two camps. The Swiss Association for Tobacco Control advocates a “tobacco-free and nicotine-free” Switzerland. Other health professionals view e-cigarettes – containing nicotine – as a risk reduction tool. They point to the fact that it is tobacco, not nicotine, that kills more than 9,000 people every year. The problem, however, is that these conflicting messages end up muddying the prevention waters.

# Getting on the electoral register is simple and straightforward

You can live abroad but still vote on Swiss matters. Switzerland grants voting rights to its citizens living abroad. If you want to exercise your voting rights, you must first get on the electoral register.

MARC LETTAU

Some 780,000 Swiss live abroad, of whom a large proportion – over 600,000 – are older than 18 and therefore entitled to vote under Swiss law. However, many do not avail themselves of the political rights that Switzerland grants to its expatriate citizens. At present, the electoral register contains the names of 220,000 Swiss Abroad. But many who have not voted to date may well be wondering how they can get their names on this register now that election year is under way.

## How to qualify

The procedure is relatively easy and – here's the key – only needs to be completed once. After being entered in the register, you will always receive the necessary ballot material automatically by post. The statutory requirements for being entered in the electoral register are also quite simple: you must be at least 18 years old, your permanent residence must be abroad, you must be registered with the Swiss representation in your country of domicile, and you must not be legally incapacitated from voting. You will not incur any fees for being entered in the electoral register. Furthermore, you pay nothing for the privilege of voting as such – or almost nothing: there is still the small matter of covering the postage cost when returning your ballot papers.

## How to proceed

Voting in elections and popular votes is an immersive, additional way of engaging with your country of origin. Moreover, the fact that Swiss Abroad are entered in the electoral register of their most recent Swiss municipality of residence further accentuates this bond. If you have never

lived in Switzerland, you will be registered with your Swiss municipality of origin. The name of your municipality is one of the items of information you will need to be entered in the register. The Application to exercise political rights is a straightforward form that you can download online, fill in by hand and send to the Swiss representation in your country of domicile.

## Numerous opportunities to participate in Swiss democracy

Swiss who live in Switzerland can exercise their democratic voice in many ways and can make political decisions more than once a year at municipal, cantonal and federal level with their vote. The rights of Swiss Abroad are not quite as wide-ranging. All expatriates can vote at national level. Apart from casting their ballots, they also have the right to sign petitions calling for referendums or popular initiatives, as well as the right to run for election to the National Council. Ten cantons – Berne, Basel-Landschaft, Fribourg, Jura, Geneva, Grisons, Neuchâtel, Solothurn, Schwyz and Ticino – also grant voting rights at cantonal level to their citizens living abroad.

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

## One hindrance remains

Swiss Abroad, especially those who live overseas, often complain of receiving their voting papers too late and essentially being unable to vote as a result. They continue to clamour for e-voting – and the authorities have heard their call. Intense preparations are under way for a new series of e-voting pilots. Furthermore, a number of pilots trialling the dispatch of voting papers via diplomatic courier have already been completed and are now being evaluated.



### Useful information about the federal elections – at [www.elections-2023.ch](http://www.elections-2023.ch)

The 2023 elections are an important matter for the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), which has set up its own dedicated online portal at [www.elections-2023.ch](http://www.elections-2023.ch), providing useful information about the forthcoming elections. The website's content includes the OSA 2023 election manifesto, information on the political parties and on any Swiss Abroad running for election to the National Council as well as reports in the Swiss media relating to the Swiss Abroad.

(AW)

The Application to exercise political rights form is available to download at [revue.link/form](http://revue.link/form)





## The Swiss heading into space

Marco Sieber has achieved what many children dream of. He is being trained to become an astronaut. Sieber, a qualified doctor who grew up in Burgdorf, is keen for space flight to gain greater exposure in Switzerland again.

EVELINE RUTZ

The news spread like wildfire: Switzerland has a new astronaut. On 23 November 2022, the European Space Agency (ESA) presented its new team of astronauts, which includes five career astronauts and 12 reserve astronauts. One of the crew who appeared on stage was career astronaut Marco Sieber from Burgdorf (canton of Berne). The 33-year-old Sieber, who was selected from over 22,500 fellow applicants, told the media that space had fascinated him from a young age

naturally inquisitive person with a thirst for knowledge. Certainly, Sieber's career to date is impressive. He most recently worked as a helicopter rescue emergency medical doctor before holding the position of urologist at Biel Hospital. Sieber is a para scout in the Swiss army and previously worked as chief medical officer with KFOR, the NATO-led international peacekeeping force in Kosovo. He holds a private pilot licence and enjoys ski touring, paragliding, scuba diving, and kitesurfing in his free time.

or to the Moon. The ESA wants to send one of the new members of its astronaut corps into space in 2026 at the earliest.

Switzerland is a founder member of the ESA, which it helps to fund. Its financial contribution for the years 2023 to 2025 will amount to 600 million Swiss francs. "We are a trusted partner for the space industry and can offer a great deal of expertise," says Sieber, adding that his involvement will allow space flight to gain greater exposure in Switzerland again.

Sieber is following in the footsteps of Claude Nicollier, the first Swiss in space. Starting in 1992, Nicollier took part in four NASA shuttle missions and notably repaired the Hubble telescope on a space walk. The pictures of Nicollier in space and the words of then Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi ("Joy abounds!") remain etched in the mind.

Nicollier is delighted at the prospect of someone flying the flag for Switzerland in space again and believes that Sieber will be an inspiration not least to young people. "He will become a linchpin in training the next generation of Swiss in the areas of science, technology and mathematics." Becoming an astronaut is hard, says the 78-year-old. "You have to take in an awful lot of detailed information." But doing so is also "a pleasure and a privilege".

After completing his basic training, Marco Sieber will remain in Cologne initially. As soon as he is nominated for a mission, he will have to do further, more specific training either at NASA in the United States, or in a different ISS partner country. "But that's still a long way off," he says.



New career astronaut Marco Sieber at the ESA presentation ceremony on 23 November in Paris. Photo: Sebastiaan ter Brug, Utrecht, Wikimedia commons

and that he used to build model space rockets with his brother. He was now fulfilling a childhood dream.

Sieber has relocated to Cologne in the meantime, where he will begin 12 months of basic training in April at the ESA's European Astronaut Centre. "I look forward to everything that awaits," he said, adding that he is a

In Cologne, Sieber will now learn about the set-up and workings of the International Space Station (ISS). Among other things, he will do survival training and take Russian lessons. Russian is the other official language on board the ISS in addition to English. Sieber's first space mission could eventually take him to the ISS –

For the complete version of this article, visit [revue.link/sieber](https://revue.link/sieber)

## The Swiss Abroad earn a place in the new Swiss passport

The new Swiss passport was introduced on 31 October 2022. It has been a long time coming, but the “Fifth Switzerland” will now have its own dedicated passport page for the first time. As with the previous Swiss passport, the holder’s biometric data will be stored in a microchip located in the cover.

Every passport is unique, allowing its holder to prove their identity and nationality. Passports are valuable documents. In accordance with the Federal Identity Documents Act, all Swiss nationals are entitled to one of both types of identity document, i.e. a passport and an identity card. The Swiss passport in its current design is around 20 years old.

Most recently, 2006 saw the introduction of biometric data in line with security requirements. The new passport series conforms to the latest identity document standards and incorporates unique design elements inspired by the Swiss landscape.

Switzerland’s new full series covers the standard passport, the diplomatic passport, the service passport, the passport for refugees, and the passport for non-Swiss who live in Switzerland. During the years it took to develop the new passport, the cantons were informed of the various design options and asked to provide feedback. A majority of cantons voiced their support for the progressive design endorsed by the now retired Federal Councillor Simonetta Sommaruga.

### Passport to feature a “Fifth Switzerland” page

The new passport depicts the country’s diverse geography, breathtaking mountains, and landscapes formed by water. Every canton – complete with geographical area, highest altitude, and cantonal flag – features in the design. Meanwhile, the outlines of cantonal buildings are a new visual feature, only visible under UV light. The federal government has also decided to dedicate one of the visa pages to the 780,000 or so expatriates who live in the “Fifth Switzerland”: alongside the 26 cantons, there is also an inside page representing the symbolic “27th canton” of the Swiss Abroad.

Traditional and cosmopolitan at the same time – the new biometric Swiss passport features an additional page dedicated to the “Fifth Switzerland”.

It also has the latest security technology, including an electrotype watermark representing a quartz crystal superimposed on the Swiss cross.

Photo: fedpol



The history of the Swiss passport reflects decades of technological and social progress. Photo: fedpol

## Traditional and cosmopolitan at the same time

The passport takes you on a virtual journey through all of Switzerland's cantons in order of their highest elevation. A continuous landscape, from high mountains to rolling lowlands, represents the unifying element in the background. The cantons in this order of sequence do not all share a border, hence the contours depicted on the page are a virtual representation of a typical Swiss landscape. The new passport retains the iconic red cover.

Very much in keeping with the overall theme, the page containing the passport holder's personal details features the highest peak in the Gotthard massif, the Pizzo Rotondo. The sources of Switzerland's main rivers stretching beyond the country's borders are contained within the Pizzo Rotondo. This is where mountains and water are intertwined as the main leitmotifs. Waterways are the silvery thread that runs through all 26 cantons, from the Alpine peaks down to the valleys. Taken as a whole, these visuals epitomise the traditional but cosmopolitan qualities of today's Switzerland.



### 2022

The new family of identity documents combines functionality and aesthetics with countless security features. Photo: fedpol

## The Swiss passport has evolved over time

The cantons used to be able to issue passports before the First World War suddenly made international travel much more difficult. As a consequence of the hostilities, the Federal Council enacted an ordinance on 27 November 1916, which specified that there should be one standard passport application form for the whole country. Initially, the cover of the Swiss passport was green and then brown. It was not until 1959 that the passport's contemporary red livery and the Swiss cross were introduced.

Back then, the document contained such details as the holder's eye colour and their profession. Children had their photos stuck on to their parents' passport. The design was updated in 1985, with the Swiss cross moving to the centre of the passport cover. Since 2003, the cross has been positioned higher up. Biometric passports were introduced in 2006.



## The new mobile biometric passport device

- The new biometric data infrastructure includes state-of-the-art mobile biometric passport devices at your local Swiss representation abroad – a new facility that enables you to have your biometric data captured without the need to visit an embassy, a general consulate or a regional consular centre.
- This mobile biometric service saves Swiss Abroad from having to travel long distances to renew their identity documents. They can complete the process near their place of residence instead.
- A limited fleet of mobile biometric devices are available for Swiss representations to use. Whenever a representation is planning to use one of these devices, it will notify in advance all Swiss registered in the vicinity.
- Make sure you renew your identity documents before they expire. Depending on staff and financial resources as well as availability, it may only be possible to use a mobile biometric passport device once every year or two at your local representation. Note that you can also renew any Swiss identity document several months or even one to two years before its expiry date.
- All identity documents that have been issued retain their validity until their expiry date. The application procedure remains the same.
- To obtain the new Swiss passport, you must arrange an appointment at your local Swiss representation abroad for the purpose of entering your biometric data.
- Please order your Swiss passport or identity card online at [www.schweizer-pass.ch](http://www.schweizer-pass.ch). Your local Swiss representation abroad will then deal with your application.

ERWIN GASSER,  
CONSULAR DIRECTORATE, FDFA

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## Federal votes

The Federal Council determines voting proposals at least four months before the voting date. It has decided not to hold a vote on 12 March 2023. The next voting date is 18 June 2023.

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



## Popular initiatives

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

- Federal Popular Initiative 'Reshaping the economy into a communitarian quota-based system' (10.07.2024)
- Federal Popular Initiative 'Safeguard Swiss neutrality (Neutrality Initiative) (08.05.2024)
- Federal Popular Initiative 'Say yes to independent personal financial provision' (25.04.2024)
- Federal Popular Initiative 'Say yes to independent naturopathy' (25.04.2024)

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



## Information

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

# The path to university studies in Switzerland

University, university of applied sciences and university of teacher education: these are the three types of university in Switzerland. They all offer three-year bachelor's programmes and subsequent master's programmes. A brief summary of the most important facts.

## Three types of university

The **universities** offer studies in law and economics, in mathematics and natural sciences, and in humanities and social sciences, while the federal institutes of technology ETH (Zurich) and EPF (Lausanne) focus on engineering, mathematics and natural sciences. The **universities of applied sciences** focus on practical-oriented courses of study, particularly in the fields of health, social sciences, business administration, innovative technologies, music, and art. The **universities of teacher education** train students to become qualified teachers for the various school levels.

## Admission requirements

The requirement for admission to a bachelor's degree programme is a federally recognised Matura certificate or an equivalent foreign diploma. The universities set country-specific standards for

foreign diplomas. The current criteria can be viewed online: [revue.link/requirements](https://revue.link/requirements)

Admission to a university of applied sciences normally requires a vocational apprenticeship followed by a vocational baccalaureate or a maturity certificate from an upper secondary school- followed by an internship year. We recommend to clarify the admission requirements directly with the university of applied sciences of your interest.

At the universities of teacher education, the admission requirements vary depending on the degree programme.

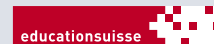
## Required languages skills

Good language skills in at least one national language, depending on the language region in which you want to study, are usually essential. There are only a few bachelor's programmes that are lectured purely in English, whereas many master's programmes are in English.

## Application deadlines

Most bachelor's programmes start in September and the application deadline is 30 April with rare exceptions such as medicine or special programmes like sports science. Universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education may have different application deadlines.

RUTH VON GUNTEN



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## Culture is the theme of the next congress

This year's Congress of the Swiss Abroad will take place from 18 to 20 August 2023 in St Gallen – and culture will be its overriding theme. Cultural dissemination and international cultural dialogue are key elements in promoting Swiss culture. Along with maintaining Switzerland's tangible and intangible heritage, these factors have a major influence on shaping our identity as well as on the way that Switzerland is viewed abroad.

The next Congress of the Swiss Abroad promises to see some lively debate around the question of culture. With its wealth of cultural treasures, St Gallen is a fitting venue for the stimulating discussions that await.

Visit [www.swisscommunity.org](http://www.swisscommunity.org) > Congress for continually updated, detailed information about the upcoming congress, which has become a useful and popular forum for the Swiss Abroad. A detailed schedule as well as registration forms will also be available on the website.

(MUL)

## Zürcher Kantonalbank offering Swiss Abroad a fairer deal

It is often a challenge for Swiss Abroad to maintain a bank account in Switzerland. The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) has been trying for years to make things easier in this regard. It has now entered into a new partnership with Zürcher Kantonalbank (ZKB) to deliver a range of attractive banking terms for Swiss Abroad, with effect from 1 January 2023. This is the OSA's second partnership with a bank, following the one it entered into with Banque Cantonale de Genève in 2017.

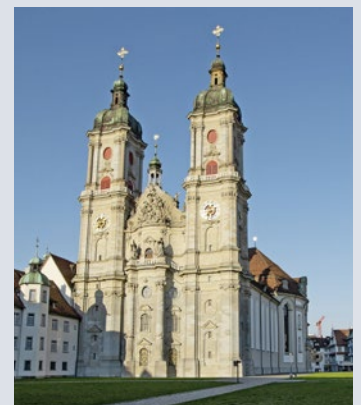
ZKB will offer Swiss Abroad similar banking services to those it offers Swiss who live in Switzerland. "We have already been assisting expatriate Swiss for years," says Reto Jäger, Regional Head Private Banking International at ZKB. "There is no mini-

imum amount to open an account, we offer a wide range of services and we have people with outstanding expertise." Jäger calls the partnership with the OSA a "milestone" and firmly believes that ZKB will be able to further its reputation among Swiss Abroad as a reliable partner.

FLORIAN BACCAUNAU



ZKB offer for Swiss Abroad: [revue.link/zkb](https://revue.link/zkb)



Built in 1766, the baroque Collegiate Church of St Gallen dominates the city skyline. Photo provided

## Winter fun in unseasonably mild conditions

Our winter holiday camp for 8- to 14-year-olds in Valbella (canton of Grisons) was a complete success. The 40 children at the camp had lots of fun despite the unseasonably mild temperatures, our camp leaders ensuring that everyone got the most out of their time in Switzerland.



For ten days, the children were able to improve their skiing and snowboarding. Our camp leaders gave their all both on and off the piste – even going easy to let everyone win at least one Uno card game.

Besides going down the slopes, the children had the opportunity to do other activities like tobogganing and ice-skating. They also did handicrafts, wrote postcards, played board games – and made lots of friends. Overall, it was an unforgettable experience for all the children, and we made lots of memories to cherish.

Thank you for taking part, and we look forward to seeing you next year. We hope many of you will sign up for our next winter camp, which takes place in Valbella again. Registration for the camp begins on 6 September 2023.

DAVID REICHMUTH, FYSA

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

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## A winter camp full of memories and highlights



Skiing and snowboarding all day long. A trip to Zermatt. Seeing in the new year, Swiss style. The 2022/23 winter camp of the Youth Service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad was packed full of highlights.

The 26 young Swiss Abroad attending the winter camp in Grächen (canton of Valais) from 28 December 2022 to 6 January 2023 came from 14 different countries. Participants were able to specify in advance whether they wanted to ski or snowboard. Two of the skiers and one of the snowboarders were absolute beginners. The three of them received expert tuition and plenty of encouragement from our qualified camp leaders.

We not only celebrated New Year's Eve together, but also the birthday of one of the camp participants on 1 January – double reason to party. After a good sleep and delicious brunch, we took advantage of the beautiful New Year's Day weather and trav-

elled to Zermatt to catch a glimpse of the Matterhorn.

We spent the rest of the week on the piste again. Our camp participants decided to mix things up on the final day and switched from snowboarding to skiing or vice versa, enjoying an even broader winter sports experience as a result.

FABIENNE STOCKER, YOUTH SERVICE

  
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## Discussion: chestnuts are a little piece of Switzerland

Of the various things we miss when living outside Switzerland, some are really quite unremarkable. Think, for example, of those quaint wooden huts selling sweet-scented chestnuts (with a laugh and a joke) on our city side streets. It is no wonder that our article about this little piece of cultural heritage in the previous edition of “Swiss Review” prompted a big reader response.



### Chestnuts – part of Switzerland’s cultural heritage

#### SUSANNE BOOTS-NOEBEL, NEW ZEALAND

The article about chestnuts and their cultural significance took me back to the days of my youth. In both my childhood and teenage years, the chestnut stands in Zurich typified autumn. Every so often, our parents would buy us a bag of these aromatic treats. I have been living happily in New Zealand for decades, but to read articles like this from Switzerland warms my heart and makes me want to catch the whiff of hot chestnuts in the air again and eat a whole bag of them.

#### LOUIS KRÄHENBÜHL, MEXICO

As a boy growing up in Basel, I can well remember the chestnut sellers, all of whom were Italian. A bag – or a “Gugge” in Basel dialect – cost around 40 centimes back then, and we would laugh at the man shouting “aissi Marroni!” in his Italian accent.

#### DANIEL GILLIÉRON, CHENGDU, CHINA

In polycultures, chestnut trees like to be in the vicinity of hazels, oaks, black alders, ferns, heather, gorse, honeysuckle, horse-radish, ivy, peanuts and mushrooms. Preserving chestnut groves is important for our (aesthetic) enjoyment of the countryside. Chestnut growing could conceivably shift

further north as a result of climate change. With the harvest period lasting from August to December, chestnuts can be an additional source of income for farmers.

### Switzerland is laying the groundwork for solar power plants in the Alps

#### HEINZ MANHART, PHILIPPINES

Another wrong decision. Leaving the aesthetics aside: who is going to keep the solar panels free of snow and ice? How much energy will we lose distributing it around the country? Instead of spending money on these Alpine eyesores, subsidising private solar installations would make more sense, as energy would then be produced where it is actually needed. By the way, I have solar panels on my own roof.

#### JACK BRUNNER, AUSTRALIA

That will destroy the beauty of Switzerland. What happens with the waste from the solar panels when they have to be replaced? I am in Australia and totally self-sufficient with solar. All my panels are on my roof. No destruction of natural beauty and free power! Nuclear power would have been a much safer and cheaper solution. But now Switzerland is importing power made from France.

#### ERICH SUTTER, USA/SWITZERLAND

The article failed to mention how we store solar energy. The sun only shines during the day. Storing large quantities of energy in batteries or as hydrogen is an issue we still haven’t resolved.

### The 2023 elections: how the main political parties approach the “Fifth Switzerland”

#### MICHEL GUIGNARD, FRANCE

Congratulations on producing this informative summary. It’s an issue that “Swiss Review” needs to continue following closely!

#### WOLFGANG WITTENBURG, CANADA

I have been living in Canada for more than 50 years. Although I was originally happy at the prospect of being able to exercise my political voice as an expat, I eventually decided not to. It is not that I am indifferent to what is happening in the country in which I was born and grew up. And I am able to keep informed thanks to relatives, the media and occasional visits. However, never having to experience the consequences of voting from afar because I live permanently in Canada would not sit well with me. I know that Swiss citizens should all have the same rights, so those who wish to exercise their right to vote while abroad can and should do so. At the end of the day, the decision on whether to vote is a personal one. Just as it is for those who live in Switzerland.

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

Link to the SwissCommunity discussion forum: [members.swisscommunity.org/forum](http://members.swisscommunity.org/forum)



Translation of the Romansh text on page 19 (see “The breakneck language” article) – Daniel Telli did the original Romansh translation from German.

“The work that we do at Lia Rumantscha is anything but highbrow. It is important that users can interact directly with the Pledari Grond and play their part in evolving our language. This reinforces the sense that Romansh belongs to everyone who uses it. Romansh must never become an artificial language but should live and breathe to reflect the changing times.”

# We need panoramic views.



Switzerland.



Aerial, Geneva, © Jan Geerk

# We need Switzerland.

Discover the Swiss cities now: [MySwitzerland.com/cities](https://www.myswitzerland.com/cities)  
Share your best experiences [#IneedSwitzerland](https://twitter.com/IneedSwitzerland)



Switzerland.  
by train, bus and boat.

