

SWISS REVIEW

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad
September 2018



**In Swiss schoolrooms
big changes are taking place**

**Compact cities spare the land,
but not always the nerves**

**A contract child's childhood:
Despite reparation, scars remain**

Sign the Petition!

Online Petition E-Voting



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The petition can be signed by every person, irrespective of their age, sex, nationality or place of residence (in Switzerland or abroad).

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In front of many Swiss schoolroom doors today children's shoes of different sizes are lined up: very small ones next to larger ones. The shoe rack is an indication of what is happening inside the classroom. More and more primary schools are introducing classes of mixed age groups. Instead of teaching the children according to the year in which they were born, classes are being formed of kindergarten children along with

first- and second-year pupils. That is to enable children at the beginning of their education to learn at their own speed and acquire social skills. Such changes are immediately obvious, but there are others that are more far-reaching. Primary schools are currently adapting to a new curriculum, a curriculum that is changing their basic education concept. In addition to pure knowledge, schools in future will primarily convey learning strategies, that is, the skills to be able to confidently navigate the seas of knowledge.

All those for whom such changes cause worries complain that the “commodity of education”, so important to Switzerland, is in danger of losing importance. One thing is for sure: Switzerland is investing a great deal in education. Around 37 billion Swiss francs is spent on it every year by the federal government, cantons and municipalities. This is always eagerly pointed out in educational debates. Those who look closely, though, put the numbers into perspective: in relation to our high gross domestic product, spending on education is quite average. Seen in this way, Switzerland ranks only in the middle field of the industrial nations – in 23rd place.

The debate about the primary schools of the future often seems to be somewhat academic. Something completely unplanned and unintended is also bringing about change: as our author Mireille Guggenbühler points out, fewer and fewer men are teaching in primary schools. They consider the wages to be too low. The majority of teachers in the classrooms are women. Without them, school life would collapse. But without men as teachers, children are being deprived of key role models. That is also one of the aspects determining the quality of schools.

And finally, on a personal note: the months of my interim heading of “Swiss Review” have come to an end. As of now I am editor-in-chief, responsible for the “Review”, helping to shape it and further develop it – with the support of a great team. I hope that the “Review” succeeds in continuing to draw a coherent and valid picture of that which impacts and drives Switzerland. For this to happen we rely on the feedback of our readers. In times of growing media frenzy, the “Review” wants to remain as it is: solid and reliable.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cover photo: It's all neat and tidy at the Spitalacker School in Bern. Photo: Adrian Moser

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Fête des 20 Vignerons 19



The “Fifth Switzerland” participates in the Fête des Vignerons 2019 as 27th canton!

Thanks to the link in the QR code, Swiss Abroad have preferred access to purchase their tickets for the Swiss Abroad Day on 25 July 2019.



Tourism is contributing to the “eventisation” of the Swiss mountains



Thank you for the wonderful article about the development of tourism in Switzerland and the discussion that has been going on for generations about its merits and risks. I myself come from a Grisons tourism region and therefore am well informed about the issue. One simply must not forget that thousands of jobs depend on tourism. Without tourism the Alps would

be a desolate, rarely used place with no future for the young. As a mountaineer, I can reassure all the critics of tourism. Each time I stand atop a mountain peak and let my eyes wander across the panorama, I still see many, many mountains that are completely untouched.

RETO DERUNGS, HIGUEY, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

I realize that commercialism is tainting every pristine place in the world. All I know is my own experience while staying in Interlaken and hiking in the Berner Oberland (Bernese Highlands).

My father was born in Bern, and my wife and I had traveled from Washington state to see Switzerland for the first time. I'd even cut my thumb with a Victorinox knife the day before, on my 60th birthday. It seemed fitting to leave some blood in the homeland.

We rode up to Mürren in a gondola lift under a sky of blue. The amazing views of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau dazzled us while walking to Gimmelwald. We met a local on the trail who also was on his birthday holiday. This was a trek he took every year. There are those who miss the Switzerland of the past, and those like me who are captivated today. If one has an inspired vision that isn't just about pumping money out of tourists, then perhaps change won't destroy the Switzerland of tomorrow. Move forward with great sensitivity. You can never go back.

TREVOR GLOOR, WASHINGTON, USA

It is not my intention to condemn tourism per se, just its scale, and to ask what can still be considered tolerable – and what not. That is, of course, highly subjective. What drives me most is the question: what right do our national and international capital spenders and profit maximisers have that they can simply occupy landscapes – mountains, lakes, seas and cities? With all the known consequences: land and property prices, rents, and accommodation expenses are spiralling out of control; the natives are being driven out. We rich Swiss make it easy for ourselves: when we find our mountains too crowded for us due to the number of foreign tourists, we just hop aboard a plane – and jet off to the Andes or to Nepal...

I think it is time to stop now with this mania of growth at the expense of nature and humankind. It is simply not enough

to go to the supermarket and buy organic or what is supposedly regional – we should scrutinise our own actions. And that starts right up there on the Rigi.

HANS REICHERT, FRANKFURT AM MAIN, GERMANY

Magdalena Martullo-Blocher in the big footsteps of her father



Is she, like her father, crying out against Europe, yet eating from the European plate with no scruples at all, along the lines of ‘do as I say and not as I do’?

MICHEL PIGUET, COMMENT ONLINE

Cat ladders: the discrete catwalk for Swiss kitties



Hello, sorry, but I cannot agree with your line: “Cats would probably cope with everyday life without the climbing aids.” Cats need freedom and, depending on the floor on which the flat of their owners is located, they cannot go outside as they please. One too often sees cases where cats have taken a leap and have either died or been found crippled. What's more, these “staircases” are ideal play areas and they also improve the health of cats, allowing them to move around as opposed to cats that are always kept inside. I find this to be an excellent initiative and am going to immediately make a “chicken ladder” for my cat.

LILIANE ENJOLRAS, LE GRAU DU ROI, FRANCE

Thank you for the cute article about cat ladders. When I last visited Switzerland, I happened to notice all those staircases for cats. But it is only now, thanks to the “Review”, that I can see how typically Swiss these constructions are. It is a love of animals in the form of infrastructure. Some may find it strange. But most of all, it is bizarre in a beautiful way.

HELEN MEIER, AUSTRALIA

Switzerland accepts increased urban density - reluctantly

The revision of the spatial planning law has put the brakes on urban sprawl by forcing local authorities to increase the density of built-up areas, although the application of this policy is not without opposition.



STÉPHANE HERZOG

Building in cities and in their vicinity, wherever spaces may be exploited, in order to brake urban sprawl, which gnaws away 1.2 square metres of agricultural land per second; but also reducing buildable areas which are too extensive. This is the concept accepted by the Swiss who supported the new spatial planning law (SPA), which entered into effect in May 2014. In a country in which the legal instruments allowing agricultural areas to be demarcated from buildable areas were implemented belatedly, i.e. at

the end of the 1960s, the new law imposes genuine barriers against exponential consumption of land. “The SPA has introduced a five-year moratorium, prohibiting municipalities from demarcating new building areas unless they are offset with agricultural land, with the cantons obliged to submit a masterplan to the Confederation within this deadline. This brake will have effects,” says Christa Perregaux DuPasquier, deputy director of the territorial planning association which has become EspaceSuisse.

This project in the municipality of Chêne-Bougeries in Geneva is considered exemplary, the timber facades are reminiscent of rural architecture.

Between 1985 and 2009, housing and infrastructure areas grew by 23.4 % in a territory where this footprint amounts to 7.5 %. This process above all affected urban belts and metropolitan areas. Is Switzerland densely populated? “That is hard to say,” points out the urban planner and architect Jérôme Chenal, who directs the Urban and Regional Planning Community (CEAT) of the École Polytechnique Fédérale in Lausanne. He considers that a journey across the Swiss Plateau reveals a density which remains acceptable and that the potential for in-

creased density remains significant within Switzerland, notably in low-density towns.

Housing? Yes, but not in my backyard

Founded in 1943 to protect natural areas, the EspaceSuisse Association received a mandate from the Confederation to support municipalities and cantons in applying urban densification measures required by the SPA. And there is big demand, since if the idea of safeguarding agricultural and natural spaces is accepted by the Swiss, the concept of densification frightens them. A recent example is that of a plan for 268 residences in the Genevan municipality of Chêne-Bougeries. This was rejected in March in a referendum against the opinion of the municipality and of the canton, despite its moderate density, i.e. a ground use index of 0.9 (see inset). Rejecting houses in order to protect a market gardening area, in a canton with an acute shortage of flats? The reaction may seem selfish. “We can’t blame the inhabitants of this municipality,” says Jérôme Chenal. “People considered

that this plan would undermine their neighbourhood, where they feel at ease.”

However, the reflex “Not in my backyard” attitude is not the rule, since at the same time, the Genevans approved two plans amounting to 600 residences in a municipal vote: one in the suburban municipality of Bernex, the other in the heart of the urban neighbourhood of Petit-Saconnex. This vote corresponds to another desire of the Swiss, that “of being close to their work and of having local services”, underlines the director of CEAT.

“Switzerland remains an anti-urban country”

This movement of opposition to cities is a deep-rooted reflex among the Swiss, whose country “remains anti-urban, and in which the ideal of a small house and nature dominates”, notes Nicolas Bassand, lecturer in architecture at the School of Engineering, Architecture and Landscape (HEPIA). Demand for space is nevertheless increasing, as is noted by the deputy director of EspaceSuisse. “On the one

hand, the population is increasing, on the other, the number of large households is falling.” In 1930, half of them had five people or more, while today, two thirds of them have one to two people. Moreover, mobility is exploding, swallowing up land with infrastructure, notably on account of time devoted to leisure, which doubled between 1984 and 2000, with 60% of travel time linked to these activities.

Creating density in an area of small houses, by exploiting suburban housing culture

In Geneva, zone 5, dedicated to single-family houses, represents almost half of the buildable area of the canton but only houses slightly more than one inhabitant in ten. The problem is that the building of denser residences in these areas faces stiff opposition, with the very idea of densification carrying negative notions, linked, for example, to delinquency, or to the notion of standardised housing.

However, times are changing, believes Nicolas Bassand. “Part of the population has moved away from the model of small houses with thuja hedges and lawnmowers. Furthermore, economic pressure will perhaps cause owners of small houses to accept housing projects in these zones, provided that they are designed carefully and in a way which involves both homeowners and project managers.”

The architect cites the example of buildings erected on the edge of the zones of small houses which have succeeded in more than doubling density, from a land use index of 0.3 to 0.8, “by incorporating the cultural codes of the suburban area”. Bassand cites the Brüggliäcker complex, in Schwamendingen (ZH) and that of the Route Jean-Jacques Rigaud, in Chêne-Bougeries (GE). In Zurich, the gables of the building (in a staggered arrangement) are similar in size to the adjacent small houses. These are no rabbit hutches despite the building density. The architects have created a garden atmosphere. In Geneva, the project, with its gable roofs and wooden facades, echoes rural architecture.

Bassand dedicated his doctorate to the question of the “depth” of buildings. This compact way of building, deriving from certain mediaeval structures, was abandoned in the 20th century, resulting in thin and spaced housing blocks, which addressed the hygienist concerns of town planning. This depth returned at the turn of the century in Switzerland, with denser and wider buildings. The lecturer at the HEPIA cites the Schürliweg building, in Affoltern (ZH) as an example, with a thickness of 38 metres, and a block with a depth of 19 metres, erected in the Hardturm neighbourhood of Zurich-West, which includes collective flats with 13 rooms.



The Brüggliäcker estate in Schwamendingen, created by a housing cooperative, is adjacent to a conventional district of detached houses.

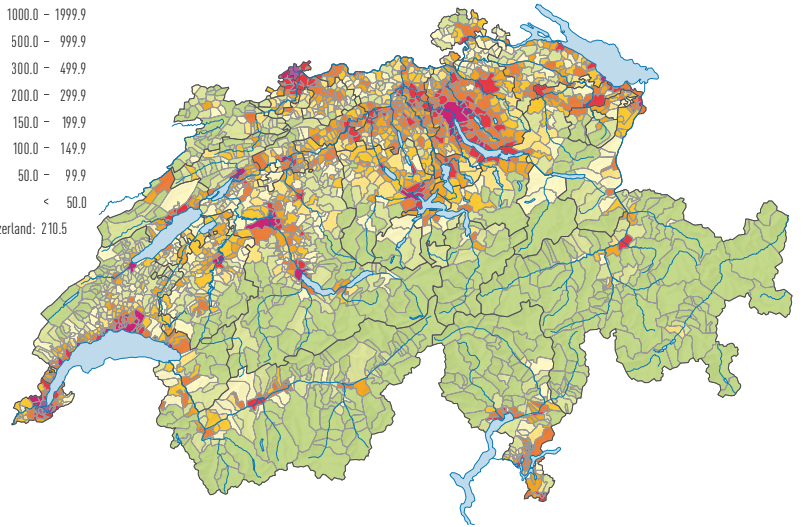
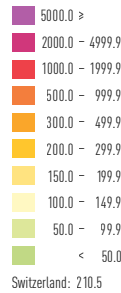
Concrete and people per square metre: density calculations

Density measures may vary by canton, for example, including or excluding parts of the basement in the reference areas, says Nicolas Bassand. Several indices are used by architects, including the land use index (IUS), which calculates the gross living area with regard to the plot. The density (IUS) of a skyscraper may be 15, providing 30,000 square metres of living area on a 2,000 m² plot. If the IUS of a small house is 0.3, the 1,000 square metres of land will generate 300 square metres of living area.

Other indices of density are those linked to human presence per hectare or square kilometre. The City of Geneva is the densest municipality in Switzerland (with 12,800 inhabitants per square kilometre, against 4,500 in Zurich).

“Density is an accounting notion,” comments Jérôme Chenal, who advocates a scientific approach to this question, capable of indicating whether or not densification represents the best solution for a given space. For example, he says, “closely packed tall buildings are not optimal for capturing solar energy”. The director of CEAT

Inhabitants per km² total area



From the 2017 “Bevölkerungsdichte” (Population Density) atlas from the Federal Statistical Office. ©BFS

also points to a certain lack of preparation in Switzerland in the face of the densification of cities, notably in conjunction with the capacity of built land to absorb heavy rains. On this point, he cites the serious flooding which occurred in Lausanne in June. Another point for attention is

pollution, “since if we invite people to live in the centre, we increase the time that they spend in a polluted atmosphere. This is one of the factors which we should take into account when we approach the question of density,” the town planner concludes.

Districts of detached houses like these are no longer compatible with today's demands for urban concentration. Photo: Keystone



“It is standards of living which have increased,” says Christa Perregaux. Densification is thus necessary, albeit while maintaining quality of life.

Housing cooperatives: accessible housing in the centre

According to Nicolas Bassand, housing cooperatives represent the best way of realising housing close to the centre but accessible to different types of income. He cites the eco-district of Plaines-du-Loup, in Lausanne, a peri-urban area, planned to accommodate 11,000 inhabitants, and which will include cooperatives. At the same time, the cooperative system, which is very fashionable in German-speaking Switzerland, requires local authorities to own the land used. “In Plaines-du-Loup, the municipality of Lausanne, which owns the ground, ensures high quality, but if we are on land in private hands, it’s a very different situation,” says Jérôme Chenal. The architect and town planner gives the example of the Praille-Acacias-Vernets (PAV) project in Geneva, which aims to create 12,000 residences and 6,000 jobs. This publicly owned area, made available to companies on a very long-term basis, sharpens the appetite of property developers, who aim for the highest possible ratio of privately owned flats to cheaper family apartments.

The risk of gentrification of centres due to urban density

Indeed, local authorities have already built in city centres in the past. This is what occurred in Geneva during the 1960s with the rental blocks of the Honegger Brothers, in the Jonction neighbourhood. “In Lausanne, the municipal authority stated that it didn’t have the resources when in fact, residential rentals would generate a capital gain on land which could be redistributed,” argues Jérôme Che-



nal. By contrast, the state develops efficient public transport. “Local authorities provide infrastructure, which benefit private agents through an increase in the attractiveness of residences located close to railway stations,” says the director of CEAT, citing the future M3 in Lausanne as an example.

The researcher highlights gentrification here, which would be one of

the major risks associated with the densification of cities. For Christa Perregaux DuPasquier there is just one solution: “The state must intervene to build residences with public utility.”

Flats for some 7,000 persons and 4,000 workplaces are planned for the Plaines-du-Loup district in Lausanne. The municipality as property owner guarantees high quality and reasonable prices.

Within Geneva, an acute need for housing has to be reconciled with a fear of urban sprawl

Building wherever possible or suffocating in intense traffic and failing to house its own inhabitants. This, in essence, is the situation which Geneva is experiencing, for which the watchword is in line with that of the spatial planning act: densify!

The aim is to build 2,500 residences every year until 2030 to house 100,000 people. This is a case of making up for lost time in a canton which creates employment and attracts new workers, while exporting part of its labour force beyond its borders. This “common sense” message is carried by the Green construction minister Antonio Hodgers to the city and its surroundings and is met with accusations that he wants to build at any price.

The architect and town planner, Jérôme Chenal, considers that “Geneva has no choice. If it wants to accommodate its workers, it will have to find a way of handling its agricultural zone, since the development of the small house zone is too difficult to execute and will take 50 years.” The problem is the “good land”, termed crop rotation zones, is protected by the Confederation and Geneva is reaching the end of its reserves of building land. “Berne is aware of these problems and is studying this question,” says Christa Perregaux DuPasquier. However, she expresses reservations. “If we touch crop rotation zones, we run the risk of opening Pandora’s box and witnessing several cantons demanding waivers,” she says.



A fight for national law, international law and human rights

The SVP wants to anchor precedence of national law over international law in the Constitution – a fundamental issue is at stake in the party’s referendum campaign. And it will be hard fought.

JÜRIG MÜLLER

“National law before international law” and “Swiss law instead of foreign judges”: these demands perfectly fit times of globally resurgent nationalism. They are simple messages with a great deal of black and white – no shades of grey. And that is the pattern being followed by the so-called Self-Determination Initiative (SDI) of the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), which is to be decided by voters on 25 November 2018. The key demand: “The Federal Constitution stands above international law and takes precedence,” except over a few compulsory laws such as prohibition of torture. In the case of international agreements that go against the Constitution, Switzerland would have to renegotiate or terminate them if necessary. Additionally, for the Federal Supreme Court under the initiative only those agreements would be binding that have been subject to referendum.

According to the SVP, self-determination and the independence of Switzerland are threatened – by “politicians, public officials and professors” who want “that the Swiss people no longer have the last word. They would like to restrict the political rights of the people,” according to the initiative text. It argues that their stance is increasingly “that foreign law, foreign judges and courts count more than that of Swiss law determined by the people and the cantons”. The self-determination initiative would ensure “that Swiss law is our highest source of law” and “that referendums be implemented without any ifs and buts, regardless whether the decision suits the ‘elite’ in federal Bern or not”. Apart from that, the SVP maintains that their initiative provides for “legal certainty and stability, in which the relationship between national law and international law is clarified”.

Threat to stability and reliability

That is just not true, say opponents of the SDI. Because the initiative demands that Swiss interna-

tional agreements that contradict the Constitution be renegotiated or terminated if necessary, that “calls into question the international obligations of Switzerland, thus threatening Switzerland’s stability and reliability”, notes the Federal Council. Among other things, the SDI would harm Switzerland’s economic position. “It jeopardises legal certainty in international trade relations” and would complicate planning for Swiss companies.

With rigid rules for dealing with possible conflicts between constitutional law and international law, the initiative would restrict the scope of the Federal Council and parliament: the pragmatic search for broadly supported solutions that would be to the satisfaction of both legal jurisdictions would no longer be possible. Switzerland would then have only two options: the change, or renegotiation, of an agreement or its termination.

International law as contract law

The contrast between international law and Swiss law is in any case largely construed, as international law is not simply foreign law that is imposed on Switzerland: international law is for the most part contract law that two states or groups of states have negotiated. International agreements in Switzerland go through a democratic process, as is usual with the enactment of national law. Today all important international agreements are subject to optional or even obligatory referendum.

Opponents of the SDI – the Federal Council, the parliamentary majority and practically all parties except the SVP – judge as particularly sensitive the demand that only those international agreements are to be binding that have been subject to referendum. Thus “the initiative urges authorities to defy existing contractual obligations”, the federal government maintains. This call for breach of contract could massively weaken Switzerland, it says, since contracting parties would no longer feel bound by agreements with Switzerland.

Kathrin Alder, lawyer and Federal Supreme Court correspondent of the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung”, is carrying out an in depth analysis of the “referendum problem”. The discussion about the conflict of national law versus interna-

tional law was stirred not least by a ruling of the Federal Supreme Court which gave the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (FMP) precedence over federal law: “The Self-Determination Initiative now wants to ensure that such rulings are no longer possible in future, promising a simple solution at first glance. The initiative, however, neither rids the world of the free movement of persons, unpopular with the SVP, nor does it provide legal clarity: the FMP was subject to referendum within the framework of the Bilateral Agreements I and therefore remains – as per the wording of the Self-Determination Initiative – binding for the Federal Supreme Court. In the event of conflict, it is the judges in Lausanne who decide.”

Focus on human rights issues

However, if the initiative is accepted, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) would no longer be binding for the Federal Supreme Court, according to Kathrin Alder. “At the time it was ratified, key international agreements were not yet subject to referendum. Its conflicting constitutional law would take legal precedence in future, with uncertain legal consequences.” The NZZ correspondent writes that the initiators “kick the dog, but mean the master: our ‘own’ judges in Lausanne are more annoying to the initiators than the ‘foreign’ judges in Strasbourg. Because it was the Federal Supreme Court that decided that ECHR and FMP take precedence over federal law. The SVP purport to want to strengthen direct democracy with the Self-Determination Initiative. In truth they want to weaken judicial power, namely the Federal Supreme Court of Switzerland. The initiative creates no conclusive hierarchy between national law and international law, rather first and foremost, legal uncertainty.”

The human rights issue is likely to play a key role in the referendum campaign. The Federal Council is warning, in the event that the initiative is accepted, of an “undermining of international human rights protection, particularly the guarantees of the ECHR”. That could lead to Switzerland no longer being able to apply provisions of the ECHR. “In the long term even Switzerland’s expulsion from the Council of Europe is not ruled out, which would amount to a termination of the ECHR.” The Council of Europe and ECHR, however, are of “vital concern” to Switzerland for the stabilisation of the constitutional state, democracy, security and peace throughout Europe, the Federal Council says.

In parliament too SDI opponents accused the initiators of wanting to override fundamental rights. This would bring with it the threat of arbitrary rule by the majority. A Yes for the initiative would result in the termination of the ECHR, it was said. But the ECHR gave citizens

the opportunity to defend themselves against the state, if necessary.

For Hans-Ueli Vogt, professor of law in Zurich, SVP National Councillor and ‘father’ of the SDI, none of that matters. In an interview with the “Weltwoche” when asked if he was undermining human rights, he said, “No. The protection of human rights in Switzerland does not depend on a foreign court. Human rights are already protected in our Constitution.”

The organisation Schutzfaktor M, that stands for protecting human rights, in contrast maintains: “We need the ECHR even if fundamental rights are guaranteed in our Constitution. For these fundamental rights are not set in stone. A majority of the people and the cantons can change the Constitution. In this manner the fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution can be amended or even abolished based on a popular initiative, for example.” Schutzfaktor M has been fighting for years against the SVP initiative, together with more than 100 other Swiss organisations.

The referendum campaign will be very tough. The parliamentary debate offered a foretaste of this. SVP parliamentary group head Thomas Aeschi spoke of a “coup d’état” by the initiative opponents who wanted to revoke voters’ self-determination. Another jab was thrown in by SVP National Councillor Roger Köppel: “What is taking place here is the stone-cold disempowerment of the people. It is a seizure of power, a type of putsch by an elite political class neither willing nor able to protect the political rights of the people, to which they have made a solemn oath.” The “political elite, intoxicated by power, is fiercely determined to usurp popular sovereignty”. Köppel described all his political opponents in the National Council as “non-democrats who wrongly call themselves representatives of the people because other countries are closer to them than Switzerland.”

Do cow horns belong in the Constitution?

On 25 November 2018 Switzerland will also vote on the “Horned Cow Initiative”. Its aim is to give agricultural livestock their dignity back and to lay down in the Constitution that horned cows and goats receive compulsory subsidisation. At the centre of the initiative committee is mountain farmer Armin Capaul. Opponents of the initiative argue that the animals are de-horned to prevent accidents. Also, it is a business decision as to whether one wishes to keep farm animals with horns or without. Initiators and a Left-Green minority in parliament found, however, that for the animals, the cauterising of their horns is linked to anxiety and pain and contradicts the animal welfare act. The Federal Council and the majority of parliament members rejected the initiative. (JM)



Will insurers be peeping into the bedroom next?

On 25 November 2018 the people will decide on a tough law against fraud in the social security sector. A tiny group has called for a referendum against social detectives.

JÜRIG MÜLLER

Social security benefits obtained by fraud at the expense of the general public are not trivial offences. When such cases come to the attention of the public, it is understandable that they spark great outrage. Such as the case of a woman who, according to the doctor's certificate, could barely walk, then tottered out all the same in her high heels, as Christian Democrat People's Party (CVP) National Councillor Ruth Humbel revealed in the parliamentary debate. The occurrence came to light through surveillance images.

But just how far is surveillance allowed to go? That was the question parliament had to answer in the session on the new legal basis for the surveillance of insured persons. It was necessary because the European Court of Human Rights and the Federal Supreme Court of Switzerland had criticised the insufficient legislative framework for surveillance. This type of insurance fraud admittedly is not all too common: according to the Federal Social Insurance Office there were 630 cases of fraudulent use of the Old Age and Survivors' Insurance (OASI) uncovered in 2017. That is 0.3 percent of a total of 220,000 OASI recipients. Two-thirds of the cases did not come to light through surveillance, but among other things through repeated medical checks. Despite everything, parliament passed a very tight law.

The insurance companies – OASI, medical, accident, unemployment, daily allowance, needs-based minimum benefits – may “secretly observe an insured person and in doing so make visual and sound recordings and use technology tools for location determination”, as it says in the new law. These measures may be instigated by a member of the management of the insurance company concerned, but “external specialists”, i.e. private detectives, may also be employed. “Technology tools for location determination”, i.e. GPS trackers or drones, would need judicial authorisation.

The Federal Council cautioned restraint

In the run-up to the debate in parliament, law professors warned of a law gone too far. Even the Federal Council did not want to allow GPS tracking. Interior Minister Alain Berset pointed to the protection of privacy and the principle of proportionality. Yet in parliament the hard line prevailed. Swiss People's Party (SVP) member of the Council of States Alex Kuprecht declared that he had more trust in the practitioners than in the law professors. GPS trackers are necessary, said CVP member of the Council of States Pirmin Bischof, to be able to locate people – after all, those who commit fraud do not just always stay in their place of residence.

Even critics of the bill, however, professed to fight fraud while respecting the rule of law. One should not put everyone under general



Author Sibylle Berg (far right), National Councillor Silvia Schenker and Dimitri Rougy handing over the signatures. Photo: Keystone

suspicion because of a couple of hundred offenders, argued Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP) National Councillor Silvia Schenker. SP member of the Council of States Hans Stöckli recalled that parliament had recently rejected a tightening of the law for tax offenders.

Insurance companies play police

Despite all the criticism in parliament, the Left then did not want to call for a referendum after all. The SP feared a debate on “social parasites” and only jumped in once a small group surrounding author Sibylle Berg and campaign specialist Dimitri Rougy (see “Top pick”, page 31) had successfully launched an online signature collection campaign. “Never”, declared the opponents of the surveillance law, “has a law encroached so deeply on the privacy of us all. It is even allowed to film inside bedrooms when this is possible from outside.” What disturbs the referendum leaders most is that the insurance companies themselves can decide if and by what means they spy on their own customers and premium payers. Combatting crime, investigations and surveillance in particular are the sole domain of the police and not of insurance companies, they say. A social detective working on behalf of an insurance company is under certain pressure to deliver the photos that the insurance companies expect. And “the insurance companies would like to pay as little as possible”, argue the law's opponents.



A fundamental change in Swiss schoolrooms

The face of Swiss primary schools is changing. New teaching methods are now part of the daily routine. The basic concept of school itself is changing – “skills” rather than knowledge are being increasingly taught. And women are more frequently the ones doing the teaching.

MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER

The windows of the schoolroom are wide open on this sunny morning. The air is still cool and the mood is relaxed. Here in Room 204 of the Spitalacker Primary School in Bern, teachers Danielle Baumann and Marie-Theres Moser are making the final preparations for the lesson prior to the arrival of their pupils aged six to eight. A total of 700 children attend the Spitalacker Primary School. Twenty-four of them – first- and second-year pupils –

make up the class of Danielle Baumann and Marie-Theres Moser. It is quite cosy, this small, neat schoolroom. And yet even here the really big changes in the Swiss school system can be seen.

The two teachers are teaching together this morning. “We enjoy team-teaching. It gives us more time for the individual children,” says Marie-Theres Moser. Otherwise, the two teachers work alternately. Both work part-time. Their profile is typical. For 75 percent of all teachers in primary

schools in Switzerland are women. And some 70 percent of all primary school teachers work part-time.

The men who still teach in primary schools do so mostly in the seventh- to ninth-year classes – or they are employed as the school principal. That is in strong contrast to the past because for a long time the teaching profession in Switzerland was purely a job for men. In 1964 the proportion of men working in primary schools dropped for the first time to below 50 percent. Since then the proportion of women has grown steadily. The teaching profession is becoming ever more female.

Without women, standstill would threaten

Beat Zemp, president of the Swiss Teachers' Association, is concerned about this trend. He would find "mixed-gender teams" better. "School, after all, is not just subjects; it should form pupils in mind, body and spirit. I am convinced that mixed-gender teams can more strongly support this holistic education," he says. At the same time, Zemp is very happy about the many women teaching: "Without women, the Swiss school system would be at a standstill." The lack of teachers is acute and will only get worse because many will soon be retiring while the number of pupils is growing, says Zemp.

That the lack of teachers will become even more dramatic is something feared also by Martin Schäfer, rector of the University of Teacher Education Bern: "Someday here in Switzerland we will probably have to ask ourselves where we can find enough well-trained teachers." The fact that it is mainly women teaching in primary schools does

not bother Schäfer. In terms of professional skills they are in no way inferior to men, he says.

Association wants to raise quota of men

The profession today draws women mainly because of the good work-life balance, says Ron Halbright, chairman of the Men in Primary Schools project. "In Switzerland men and women often divide career and family work between themselves the 'traditional' way. Fathers are more likely to be the main breadwinner, mothers work part-time," says Halbright. The feminisation of the teaching profession damages its reputation, though, Halbright argues – wages have dropped, something that keeps men from taking up the profession. Today's profile leads many men to believe that working with children is basically a woman's thing. "They realise only at a late stage that they would also have been suitable for it." Despite the difficulties, Halbright's association has set itself the goal of working toward a quota of men in primary schools of at least 30 percent – all across Switzerland.

Lessons in a "learning environment"

Far removed from this discussion, the two schoolchildren Emanuel and Yael are experiencing everyday life in Bern's Spitalacker School. They enjoy going to school and like both their teachers. The fact that they like going to school is not just because of their two teachers as persons, but also because of their way of teaching. Yael is lying on the sofa in the schoolroom reading, while Emanuel works on the calculation triangle. Both think it is great that they are free to choose from certain tasks and do not necessarily have to do the same thing at the same time. The blackboard is no longer the focal point of lesson practice. For that, the schoolroom has been transformed into a "learning environment" with a variety of workstations.

The Chur model – such is the name of the teaching model that Danielle Baumann and Marie-Theres Moser use in their lessons – is a teaching model that is currently sweeping Switzerland. In Chur, where it was developed, 40 classes already work with it. Reto Thöny, former school principal and father of the model, has been travelling across German-speaking Switzerland for some five years to present his learning approach. Meanwhile, schools in French-speaking Switzerland are also using his method. "It just hasn't caught on in Ticino yet," says Thöny.

In the Chur model, lessons often begin – as in kindergarten – with a brief input in a circle. Here the class is introduced to new topics and learning tasks are presented. The

Teachers
Marie-Theres Moser
(page 13) and
Danielle Baumann
(below) practise
team teaching in
their primary school
class.

Photos: Adrian Moser





input, however, is kept purposely short – it should not reduce the time the pupils have for learning, time that they may use very independently.

One who is little surprised by the spread of the Chur model is Peter Lienhard, professor at the Zurich Training College for Teachers of Special Needs. The model is the basis for many key developments in today's schools, he says. The essential thing is "to promote pupils individually according to their skills and abilities". At the same time, school today has to include children with learning difficulties and disabilities. "Using the Chur model, one can react to those challenges in a better, more relaxed way," he says.

New curriculum, new basic concept

The success of the Chur model is also due to the fact that the basic concept of teaching and learning is changing in

Primary school classes are becoming more varied, with a mix of ages: In so-called basic-level classes, pupils aged four to eight will be taught together.

Switzerland. The new Lehrplan 21 (Curriculum 21), valid for German-speaking Switzerland, as well as the French-speaking part's Plan d'études romand specify not only the content to be learned – great importance is given also to the skills the pupils are to acquire. Learning strategies and problem solving are moving much more into the focus of the lesson.

With the new curriculum, the schools of today will be competent to react to the rapid changes in the world, says Matthias Gubler. He is a psychologist and head of the Institut Unterstrass in Zurich that trains kindergarten and primary school teachers. Gubler says, "For acquiring knowledge alone there is no need to go to school these days, there are enough learning tools available in the internet for that. One will go to school in future to acquire skills that can be carried over later into one's professional life and to be able to work with others together on a joint topic." The aim is to prepare the pupils of today for future tasks yet unknown in the society of tomorrow. "We still have a school that was created for the industrialised society of the last century," says Gubler. School will continue to change, he says. The new curriculum and the spread of the new teaching model are just the first steps of that change.

Looking forward – to the break

In Room No. 204 of the Spitalacker School in Bern, there will be many changes in the years to come. The next big step is already coming up in two years: all kindergarten and primary school children between the ages of four and eight will be taught in so-called basic-level classes. Classes will be formed in which children of both years of kindergarten plus the first- and second-year classes will go to school together. In this way the playing aspect of kindergarten and the scholastic aspect of the first primary school years will be mixed together. "That is a challenge that we are looking forward to," says teacher Danielle Baumann. The change will not affect Yael and Emanuel, though. They will no longer be in the class. But they are here still and looking forward now to the break.

MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER IS A FREELANCE JOURNALIST, SPECIALISED IN EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

The flag of freedom flew in divided Berlin

During his first ten years in Berlin, Thomas Hürlimann became a writer

CHARLES LINSMAYER

In 1974, the year in which his father, Hans Hürlimann, became a Federal Councillor, 24-year-old Thomas went to Berlin and discovered, after years as a pupil in the Einsiedeln monastery school and as a student in Zurich, a completely new, radically different world. “The flag of freedom was unmistakably flying there. The ‘red decade’ had not yet shifted to the leaden times.” He stayed in the divided city ten years, giving up his studies and soon realising that only by writing, “only in words”, could he breathe. His art did not become existential until the death of his younger brother from cancer in 1980 forced the topic of dying and transiency on him. That is how the play “Grossvater und Halbbruder” (*Grandfather and Half-Brother*) came to be, which he sent to the Suhrkamp representative in Zurich. Egon Ammann visited Hürlimann in Berlin and said, “Forget the stage, write prose, then we can publish you.”

Shortly thereafter, though, the Theatertreffen in Berlin decided to perform the play. When it was debuted in 1981 in Zurich, Hürlimann’s prose debut “Die Tessinerin” (*The Woman of Ticino*) was already in the bookshops. After the rejection, Ammann had returned to Berlin, and in the “Litfin”, a pub at the Berlin Wall, the two decided upon the establishment of the publishing house Ammann Verlag, which would publish not only “Die Tessinerin”, but also “Das Gartenhaus” (published as “The Couple” in the USA), “Fräulein Stark” (*Miss Stark*), “Der grosse Kater” (*The Day of the Cat*), “Vierzig Rosen” (*Forty Roses*) and the tales. In 1984 Hürlimann returned to Switzerland and 34 years were to pass before he was in a position to process that return – masterly alienated and heightened to a grand odyssey – in the novel “Heimkehr” (*Returning Home*).

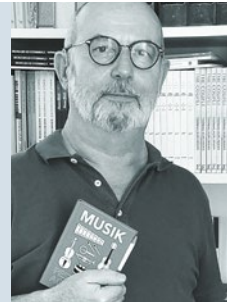
Returning home on the third attempt

Son of a factory-owner Heinrich Übel, having wasted 18 fruitless years as a perpetual student, is called home by his father, a rubber manufacturer of the same name, but is involved in a traffic accident near his father’s factory. With a disfiguring head injury, he regains consciousness in a Sicilian hotel and is now trying desperately to find out how the accident happened and what has happened to him in the time since. Bald as he is now, no one recognises him and he can virtually act as the criminal investigator on his own behalf. Gradually the submerged memory capsule re-

leases details with his search leading him to Africa, to Zurich and to Berlin. In encounters with his former lovers and a GDR functionary, with whom he falls madly in love, and particularly through contacts with persons involved in the accident, it is slowly revealed to him what happened that night. A second return home is as unsuccessful as the first, and it is only on the third attempt that he comes into conversation with his father, who is by now dealing with dementia, but still able to dispense a key finding to him: “It is all a dream, yet true. The essence of man is delusion.”

Returning home, Heinrich once again finds the love of his life; but at the scene of the accident awaits the accident vehicle now repaired. Behind the wheel sits a cat, and, with “a joint in the corner of his mouth” it races away with the returnee, “To the other side, Doc, from death to life!” The book, whose richness can only be hinted at here, shows a new Hürlimann – one for whom dying is no longer the topic, but overcoming death. A story-teller whose writing remains true to Martin Walser’s attribute of 1995: “Heavy with momentum.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY: “Heimkehr” was published by S. Fischer, Frankfurt am Main, where Hürlimann’s other books are also now available.



“One foggy night, I stuffed all the folders, notebooks and index cards on which I had jotted key words into the rubbish bins, made myself a cup of Nescafé using the immersion heater the next morning, and wrote the first syllable to sum up my entire existence to that point. I stopped short, hearing from the courtyard shaft a rumbling, the arrival of the bin men. I was immediately down the stairs, standing in front of the bins with my arms spread wide, shouting, ‘Hands off! That’s not rubbish – that’s my life!’”

(From “Heimkehr” (*Returning Home*), S. Fischer, Frankfurt 2018)

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST IN ZÜRICH

Money cannot heal all the wounds of the past

Rita Soltermann was a contract child on a farm in the Emmental. From then on she remained “trapped in the bottom drawer”. She appreciates the federal government’s moves to offer reparation for the suffering inflicted during that period. But the scars remain.

MARC LETTAU

In the sitting room of the soon to be 80-year-old Rita Soltermann of Niederönz (BE) there are flowers everywhere – and 350 porcelain piglets. It is a sight that draws a smile. But the little pigs are a souvenir of a childhood that was anything but rosy. At the age of six, Rita Soltermann was contracted to a childless mountain farming family in the Emmental. Rita was the 14th contract child in a row to slave away there on the steep hillsides of the small farm – as an unpaid worker.

At six o’clock in the morning it was time to get up and feed first the chickens and then the pigs. The farmyard smell clung to her when later, unwashed, she hurried off to school. Rita Soltermann puts it bluntly, “We stank.” After school, it was time to change clothes and get back to work. There was no time for homework on a workday. As a result, her limited schooling did not prepare her well for the future. She was not able to learn a trade, was always dealt a bad hand. “When you start out that way, you will just be ‘a helper’ for the rest of your life. You remain trapped in the bottom drawer”, she says.



Rita Soltermann, former contract child, in her sea of flowers today: “To have felt no love is the most painful thing.”

Photos: Danielle Liniger

The piggyback rider

Feeding the pigs was also the highlight in Rita Soltermann’s everyday life as a child. She liked the pigs. They became her companions and even gave her moments of happiness. “Sometimes I rode out of the sty on the back of a mother sow.” At school “Söirittere” – Piggyback Rider Rita – became her nickname.

Rita Soltermann is one of many thousands of victims of compulsory social measures. Her fate is typical of those children robbed of their childhood by the authorities supposedly for their own “welfare”. Children from lower-income families were contracted; others were moved to institutions or given up for adoption. Jenisch children were taken away from their families to guarantee them a “decent” future.

Other victims even came under the knife and were sterilised at the behest of the state. For years now Switzerland has been debating about reparation for this dark chapter in Swiss history that lasted until 1981.

The federal government has made an important contribution towards dealing with the past. In an intensive dialogue with those affected, the issue of reappraisal was tackled. The vic-

tims were promised a solidarity contribution of 25,000 Swiss francs. More than 9,000 of the mostly elderly victims have filed for a solidarity payment (see also “Review” 4/2018). Rita Soltermann is one of them.

Does the federal government’s gesture of solidarity change the view of one’s own fate? It is not so simple, Rita Soltermann says. Recognition of the injustice suffered is indeed very important. But ultimately there cannot be any actual reparation. “The experience as a child not to have felt love and never to have been hugged cannot be undone.” The memory of the distress she felt as a young mother having to fight to prevent her own child being taken away cannot be erased either. The federal government’s solidarity contribution is important, “but at the same time it is just a small gesture that does not make the scars go away.”

The dilemma that reparation cannot put everything right has also been addressed by victims’ organisations. Robert Blaser of the organisation *Fremdplatziert* said that the state had done much, but also underestimated many things, such as the defensive reaction to everything official. “For many, the authorities – government, canton, municipality and church – are in the role of perpetrator. And many could not understand why the ‘perpetrator’ wanted to give them money.” The solidarity contribution also represented “a recognition of injustice” rather than an improvement in living conditions. Blaser goes as far as to say that for victims in a precarious life situation the contribution is “disastrous”, describing it as “five months’ wages for a wrecked life”. For him that is not reparation. Luzius Mader, charged by the federal government



with the dossier, does not completely contradict that – he calls it a gesture of solidarity and not reparation (see Interview, page 19).

Appeal to the farmers

Werner Zwahlen of the *Netzwerk verdingt* says solidarity payments cannot change any person’s life history. His network had hoped for a pension solution instead of a one-time payment. Small, monthly subsidies would “have made a greater difference to the past”, he says. Zwahlen and his fellow campaigners also say that it is not enough for the federal government alone to feel committed to a historical reappraisal. Municipalities, cantons and farming organisations are hesitant in tackling their task of reappraisal. Kurt Gäggeler of the *Netzwerk verdingt* makes the criticism that as far as the farmers are concerned, the point is to “rehabilitate the farms, or free them from the curse of the past”. There is probably no basis for discussion on that yet – Hans Jörg Rüeeggsegger, president of the major farmers’ association in Bern, recently responded to Gäggeler’s claim, saying that he did not know of any farms that felt stigmatised because of the past.

Daniel Huber of the *Radgenossen-schaft der Landstrasse* (the Jenisch umbrella organisation), which campaigns for the welfare of the Jenisch and Sinti, agrees that state reparation

alone is not sufficient. Money as a gesture of solidarity is “all right and proper”. But particularly the Jenisch and Sinti who are still travelling are shown little understanding in their daily life. Huber said, “The living space for travellers is becoming ever scarcer, farmers are under more and more pressure not to permit them to set up camp.” The contrast between the benevolent attitude of the federal government and everyday reality is just too great.

Granny in a sea of flowers

Back in Niederönz, Rita Soltermann describes other facets of a life without a childhood. She did not meet her youngest sister until she was 68 years old. That shows how much one as a contract child belongs to “a family without a common history”, she says. And she talks about how easily the violence and incivility suffered are passed on, “It was only in hindsight that I realised I was a very strict mother who also dished out the lashes at times,” she says. She regrets that today, but says people carry the cruelty they have suffered within them. Nevertheless, she also speaks of great happiness – she feels secure today at her husband’s side, aware of being surrounded by a loving family.

Obviously, some things are turning out well. The “*Söiritterin*” from back then now lovingly devotes herself to her flowers and has become “*Margritli-Grosi*” – Flower Granny. That is what her grandchildren call their grandmother when Rita Soltermann smiles at them from amidst her elaborate floral arrangements.

“The contribution is a gesture of solidarity”

Luzius Mader* was charged by the federal government with the “compulsory social measures” dossier. Overall, he draws a positive interim balance.

INTERVIEW: MARC LETTAU

“Swiss Review”: Until 1980 the state inflicted suffering on many children. Are you satisfied with what has been achieved in reparation?

Luzius Mader: Yes, very satisfied. Particularly because, in contrast to earlier attempts, it was successful in getting the political reappraisal underway. The reappraisal is completed in political terms only. The academic inquiry and individual reappraisals continue.

You had to find solutions that could be implemented politically. Can the politically feasible do adequate justice to the victims?

As we wanted to achieve something concrete, it was necessary to take the political framework into account. Another failure would have been devastating.

You sat with the victims at the round table. Was that difficult?

The key thing was that we first strove for mutual trust. At the beginning, the talk was of the side of the victim and the side of the perpetrator. I made it clear that here there were no victims or perpetrators, but people who wanted to contribute to reappraisal.

That did not change the perspective for many: as a victim they had to file a request with their abuser – that is, the state.

There was no other way around it. Some public authority would have to take on the task. And rightly so: the state itself should stand up and say that an injustice has occurred and that

it therefore wants to take on the responsibility. That is quite crucial.

Up to 20,000 persons could have proved their status as a victim. Nine thousand requests have been received.

That is completely in line with what we expected. The number shows that the hurdles to even file a request were surmountable by the victims.

Acknowledged victims receive 25,000 Swiss francs: can this amount “make good” a life of disadvantage?

No. I always avoid speaking of compensation or reparation. The contribution is a gesture of solidarity. A necessary gesture, because a written confirmation of victim status cannot suffice. Many victims understood it exactly that way. The many thank-you letters are proof of this.

Those so badly afflicted by the suffering incurred that they now live on social benefits will presumably continue to do so.

Exactly. With 25,000 Swiss francs, it is not possible to radically change a life, particularly since many of those eligible are already advanced in age. But the contribution is tax-free, it does not lead, for example, to a reduction in needs-based minimum benefits. In this case the state should not give out with the one hand and take back again with the other.

It is the federal government that has acted up to now. The measures which the victims had to suffer were enacted by municipalities and cantons. Are they now off the hook?

No, they are not. Municipalities and cantons have also already done a great deal, for example, in their archives or



in setting up contact points. Additionally, municipalities such as Bern and Köniz have made substantial contributions to emergency aid.

Eight cantons up to now have also made contributions to the financing of the solidarity contribution. The fact that they have participated is more important than the amount.

You retired at the end of May, and are therefore no longer the deputy director of the Federal Office of Justice. Are you then finished with this issue?

I will continue to concern myself with this issue. I will continue to preside over the advisory commission on the solidarity contributions and will continue to look after the academic inquiry in the interest of the federal government.

* Luzius Mader was the deputy director of the Federal Office of Justice and headed the round table in favour of the victims of the compulsory social measures.

Luzius Mader:
“The reappraisal is completed in political terms only.”
Photo: Keystone

The unsuccessful fight for a new national park

Switzerland's big natural spaces are under pressure. More national parks would be the answer. Yet, a promising project in Ticino has just failed. And the prospects for Switzerland getting even one additional national park in the foreseeable future are fading.

GERHARD LOB

The road up to Bosco Gurin is twisty. The remote picture-perfect Walser village lies at 1,500 metres above sea level, making it the highest lying village in the canton of Ticino. Bosco Gurin was one of two municipalities that in a popular vote on 10 June 2018 approved the establishment of a new national park: there were 20 Yes and 17 No votes. Ascona on Lago Maggiore was also in favour. Six municipalities that would have been situated in the new national park, however, returned a majority No vote: Brissago, Losone, Ronco sopra Ascona, Centovalli, Onsernone and Terre di Pedemonte. And that spelled the end of the national park project in the Locarnese – an area on the Italian border that features a wild and sparsely populated mountain landscape.

In the Hotel Walser situated at the entrance to the village, we meet Alberto Tomamichel, farmer and mayor of Bosco Gurin. One month after the vote, disappointment is still written all over his face, even if

he is proud of the vote of his own municipality. Yet, it is clear that the projects that were foreseen for the national park area in the Locarnese will not come about. Five million Swiss francs would have been poured into the national park annually. Now there will be nothing. “For us, some civic community projects have been affected,” says the mayor, who recalls that all the mayors and civic communities stood behind the national park project in the Locarnese. “For now we’ll just let the dust settle and then we’ll see,” says Tomamichel. Will opponents of the national park now bring suggestions and ideas as to how the structurally weak area can be helped? “I doubt it,” he says.

Hope has generally died out

With the No in the Locarnese, not only has a regional project died, but also hope in general for a second national park in Switzerland. In 2000 it was Swiss environmental organisation Pro Natura that initiated the



The Onsernone Valley, here with a view of Russo, Comologno and the Isorno canyon, which would have been central to the failed Parco Locarnese. Photo: Keystone

debate via the campaign “Let’s establish a new national park”. The decisive factor was the realisation that Switzerland lags behind in big nature conservation areas compared with other countries. That is demonstrated by a look at neighbouring countries to the north and south: Germany has 24 national parks, Italy 16. Switzerland has just a single national park in the Engadin, which is actually a nature reserve. When it was established in 1914, Switzerland was a pioneer. The Parc Naziunal Svizzer, as the site is called in Romansh, is the oldest national park in the Alps and central Europe. But it remains an isolated case in Swiss history.

Following the Pro Natura initiative, the Swiss Parliament created the legal basis for a new national park through the revision of the Federal Act on the Protection of Nature and Cultural Heritage and the Ordinance on Parks of National Importance. The idea was to link nature protection and regional economic development through a new generation of national parks. Yet it seemed that the reservations of the population of the valleys about the national park regulations were just too great. Above all, the prohibitions in the core zones, the hunting and fishing prohibitions, and the prohibition on leaving marked trails met with bitter resistance. After initial enthusiasm, many projects were shelved. Or the promoters switched to the idea of setting up regional parks, for which less strict rules apply. And in fact, according to the Federal Office for the Environment, in the past 20 years in Switzerland 15 regional nature parks and one nature discovery park have come into being that have been recognised by the federal authorities. The Jorat (VD) nature discovery park is in the project phase.

In the top tier of nature reserves – the national parks – both projects that had made it to a vote failed. Prior to the No in the Locarnese this summer, the Parc Adula National Park Project in the border area between the cantons of Grisons and Ticino was stopped by residents at the ballot box. In a popular vote on 27 November 2016, eight of the 17 municipalities rejected the proposal. And no project will succeed in Switzerland unless it is democratically legitimised by support from the regions. A park cannot be imposed from above.

No further projects

Although the planning for both national park projects was exemplary – as was the interaction between the local, cantonal and federal authorities – the distrust and trepidation of the population prevailed. There is great disappointment now in nature and environmental circles that following the vote in the Locarnese there is virtually no prospect of a second national park. “At the moment there are no projects for a national park in Switzerland,” says Grisons Social Democratic Party (SP) National Councillor Silva Semadeni, who presided over Pro Natura for a long period.

Raimund Rodewald, director of the Swiss Foundation for Landscape Conservation, has not given up yet, though. He proposes that the authorities and also opponents of the national park sit down together to seek out new possibilities. “After more than ten years of planning we cannot simply say, ‘that is that.’” When road projects fail, there is always

Placards with Yes and No slogans: the Locarnese Park referendum was typically Swiss.

Photo: LOB



a search for new solutions, he says. Rodewald has written to Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard, who is politically responsible, as well as to the authorities of Ticino.

Christian Stauffer, director of the Swiss Parks Network, is disappointed about the failure of the two projects at the ballot box. In the short term, no new national park will be established. In the long term, however, he believes it is necessary. “Even in Switzerland the big natural spaces are under pressure,” says Stauffer. Among the population there is a belief that as far as nature and landscape protection go, everything is actually OK. The need for such protected areas is not recognised. It is important now to initiate a national debate, he says.

Resistance to restrictions

During the drafting of the nature and cultural heritage protection law and the parks ordinance, the Swiss Alpine Club (SAC) repeatedly pointed out that from a nature conservation point of view the rigid restrictions were not necessary and could lead to strong local resistance. “Our concerns that the law was too strict have turned out to be justified,” says Philippe Wäger, head of the SAC environment and spatial planning department. The SAC central association supported the project in the Locarnese, despite misgivings.

Is there any chance at all of a new, second national park? The Federal Office for the Environment points out that parks are created on the basis of regional initiatives. In principle the possibility of a national park remains, “if the local population would support a new project.” In Switzerland, though, there are only a few regions which would fulfil the requirements for a national park, it says. For a further revision of the law, it is clear that the initiative has to come from the government or from parliament.

“Switzerland without Europe – Europe without Switzerland”

Europe was the central theme of this year’s Congress of the Swiss Abroad calling for a taking stock of bilateral relations.



Switzerland without Europe? Europe without Switzerland? Strictly speaking, neither are possible – Remo Gysin, president of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), made that clear right at the beginning of the plenary session of the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Visp. Gysin said, “Neither alternative works, because Switzerland is as clearly a part of Europe as every other European country.”

The scene in the Visp Convention Centre, where delegates from around the world engaged in a lively debate.

The position of official Switzerland was outlined in Visp by Roberto Balzaretto, State Secretary and head of the Directorate for European Affairs of the FDFA: “To ensure the prosperity of Switzerland, relations with Europe need to be strengthened in the long term while respecting sovereignty.” He added in reference to the currently somewhat tense relations between Bern and Brussels that an agreement

needs to be found in which both sides make concessions. One should not close oneself off and withdraw, but approach each other openly in order to find solutions, he said.

“Switzerland and Europe are dependent on each other more than ever. It is time to reach a joint agreement as a stable framework is in the interest of all,” was the stance taken by Michael Matthiessen, the ambassador of the

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

European Union for Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein. Matthiessen said, “The EU is Switzerland’s biggest trading partner, and if Europe is doing well, Switzerland also benefits.”

A debate in Visp highlighted just how intensively the discussion about relations with Europe is being conducted in Switzerland: the positions of Lukas Reimann, Swiss People’s Party (SVP) National Councillor and president of the Campaign for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland (AUNS), and Claude Nicati, member of the Executive Board of the New European Movement Switzerland (NEBS), in particular, were completely irreconcilable.

The directors of OSA, Ariane Rustichelli and Sarah Mastantuoni, stated

in conclusion, “The topic of relations between Switzerland and Europe goes far beyond a purely European issue. It has a global dimension, not only because of the consequences for Switzerland, but also because of the impact on domestic and foreign policy and the economy.”

Switzerland’s relations with Europe were also central to the voting positions decided by the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA). It declared itself against the popular initiative “Swiss law instead of foreign judges” with 78 votes to 12 (see also Votes and elections on page 10). The assessment of the CSA majority was that the Swiss Abroad would be the first to feel the negative consequences of this “Self-Determination Initiative”. Prior to the vote, National Councillor Carlo

Ensuring Swiss Nazi victims are not forgotten

The Council of the Swiss Abroad clearly supports the idea of a memorial to Swiss victims of the Holocaust.

During the Second World War, more than 200 Swiss citizens were gassed, shot or slain in Nazi concentration camps. No single violent confrontation in the last 200 years has claimed more Swiss lives. More than 700 other Swiss citizens survived the camps, but remained marked by the consequences of the atrocities suffered there.

This fact is largely unknown. That is why the OSA is now calling for a memorial to remember the victims. During its session on 10 August 2018 at the congress in Visp, the Council of the Swiss Abroad clearly backed the demand with 120 votes in favour. There were no votes against.

OSA President Remo Gysin emphasised in the debate preceding the decision that it is right for the Swiss Abroad to have called for this overdue historical reappraisal. For them it is “particularly clear that the history of Switzerland does not end at the Swiss border”, he said.

No definite project exists at present, and financing of the hoped-for memorial has also still to be worked out. But following the clear vote in Visp, the OSA will further examine the issue and establish contact with other interested organisations.

(MUL)

The goal: electronic votes for everyone by 2021

The Council of the Swiss Abroad has reacted to the growing criticism surrounding electronic voting by launching a petition. E-voting is the only way to guarantee all Swiss Abroad their political rights, according to the CSA.

Some 172,100 Swiss living abroad are listed in an electoral register and can thus vote and take part in elections in Switzerland. But often the wish to exercise these political rights remains unfulfilled: voting documents frequently arrive too late, and eligible voters living far from their homeland often cannot take part in votes or elections.

Now the Swiss Abroad are bringing more pressure to bear in this area. At the session of the Council of the Swiss Abroad that took place on 10 August 2018 in Visp, delegates from around the world decided to launch the online petition proposed by the OSA and to call for the

rapid development of an electronic voting and election platform. E-voting is ultimately the only way that guarantees that the Swiss living abroad can exercise their political rights, a number of delegates pointed out.

The petition, addressed to the Federal Council and parliament, specifically calls for e-voting to be made possible for all Swiss Abroad by 2021. To lend weight to its demand, the OSA is hoping for 10,000 signatures. The petition can be signed online until 28 November 2018 (see link at the end of article). Immediately after the collection deadline – on 30 November 2018 – it will be submitted to the Federal Chancellery.

www.evoting2021.ch

Sommargua (Swiss Social Democratic Party SP/GE) summed up the stance of the CSA majority: “This initiative calls into question Switzerland’s international involvement and puts the stability and prosperity of Switzerland at risk.”

It is possible to view proceedings at the 96th Congress of the Swiss Abroad from 10 to 12 August 2018 in Visp: the recorded live stream is available on the OSA website (www.aso.ch). The date of the next Congress of the Swiss Abroad has now been confirmed. It will take place from 16 to 18 August 2019 in Montreux under the motto: “Which world for tomorrow?”

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Advice and help for those wanting to study in Switzerland

educationsuisse advises young Swiss Abroad in all matters pertaining to education – from the choice of the education programme to financing

The employees of educationsuisse advise young Swiss Abroad as well as graduates of Swiss schools abroad on all matters relating to education or training in Switzerland. This free advice in German, French, English, Italian or Spanish usually takes place by email or telephone. The team provides information on admission to higher education institutions, required language skills, vocational education, scholarships, accommodation and other topics. A personal consultation on-site in Bern is also possible by appointment.

Specific consultation on choice of profession and course of study is offered by educationsuisse in collaboration with the *Berufsberatungs- und Informationszentrum (BIZ) Bern-Mittelland* (Career Consulting and Information Centre). These consultations can be carried out via Skype or on-site in Bern. In a personal dialogue with a qualified specialist, individual questions about the choice of profession and course of study are addressed. Registration for these fee-based consultations can be done via educationsuisse.

Once there is a plan in place for a vocational education or university studies in Switzerland, there are many practical matters to be addressed. The financing of the education or training has to be clarified. While fees for studying or training in Switzerland are rather low, the cost of living is higher than in many other countries. In principle parents are responsible for financing the education of their children. For those with more limited financial means, there is the possibility of applying for a cantonal educational grant (scholarship). Responsibility for educational grants to young Swiss Abroad lies with the home canton. It should be checked first, though, if in the parents' country of residence support would be given for education or training in Switzerland. Sometimes universities or private foundations also grant education subsidies. educationsuisse assists in clarifying scholarship entitlement and takes care of the scholarship dossiers of young Swiss Abroad. Furthermore, thanks to various funds, educationsuisse can also award educational grants in the form of scholarships or loans. Employees of educationsuisse can be reached by email at info@educationsuisse.ch or by phone on +41 (0)31 356 61 04. (RG)



The youth offer for this winter

New Year's ski camp for young people in Valbella (GR), 26 Dec 2018–4 Jan 2019

Participants can expect a varied programme in the Grisons Alps. In addition to ski or snowboard lessons in small groups and a variety of fringe activities, there will also be time to make new acquaintances. Participants will be looked after by a trained and motivated leadership team. This offer is for adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18.

Adult winter sports camp in Saas-Grund (VS), 27 Dec 2018–5 Jan 2019

Now for the third time, we are offering young adults and those young at heart from the age of 18 a winter sports camp in the Valais Alps. This year the ski and snowboard camp will be held in Saas-Grund. Follow the link for a preview of the accommodation and ski resort: www.ferienhaus-schoenblick.ch and www.saas-fee.ch

German language course in Bern and French in Biel, 7–18 Jan 2019

Four language lessons in the morning, activities together in the afternoon and a welcoming host family. We encourage participants to learn German or French as one of the four national languages.

Subsidies

The Youth Service has funding available to provide support to financially disadvantaged participants: www.swisscommunity.org/de/jugend/beitragsreduktion

Registration

Places are still available. You can find more information about the offers and registration on our website: www.swisscommunity.org/de/jugend/jugendangebote.

Financial support for Swiss families abroad

The aim of the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad is to make it possible for every Swiss child living abroad to take part in a camp in Switzerland at least once – regardless of the financial situation of their family.

To make that possible, the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) collects funds every year that are intended to benefit these children. The FYSA encourages families that do not have the necessary financial means to register and fill in our application form. That way their child, too, can have a stay in Switzerland.

Families can obtain more information about the possibility of cost reductions and the conditions attached directly from the office of the FYSA.

The FYSA is looking forward to meeting many children who are curious about their Swiss roots and would like to get to know and experience Switzerland first-hand.



Winter camps for children aged 8 to 14

There are still some places free in our New Year's ski camp in Les Diablerets

Date: Wednesday, 26 December 2018 to Friday, 4 January 2019

Number of participants: 42

Fee: CHF 900 (contribution to the camp)

Ski or snowboard hire: approx. CHF 150

Registration

Details about the winter camp and the registration form can be found at <http://sjas.ch/en/>. Reduced rates are offered in justified cases. We will be pleased to post our information brochure to you on request. The winter camp in Les Diablerets (VD) is the only one offered by the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) during the 2018-19 winter season.

THE SWISS ABROAD ON INSTAGRAM



“Switzerland is still a political oasis of sorts”

Globe-trotting 32-year-old Robert Woodrich was born and raised in Canada and now lives and runs a business in Thailand. But his Swiss ancestral roots still lead him to consider Switzerland as a third “home away from home”.

My job: In 2016 I landed an opportunity to work with an American public relations firm in the heart of Bangkok. This position allowed me to learn about the regional business landscape, network, and start to prepare longer-term plans. After about one year in Thailand, I made the transition to founding and running my own company.

My Thailand: There are many ways in which I enjoy a higher quality of life in Thailand compared to Canada. For example, I can afford to hire a maid who does my laundry. The food is absolutely brilliant, although not identical to that found in western Thai restaurants.

My Switzerland: My impression of Switzerland from abroad is probably rather romantic – my fondest memories are of long ago, whereas things have changed since then. However, in a time when European countries lurch from one crisis to the next, Switzerland still appears a political oasis of sorts.

My heart: I miss Switzerland because of what it represents for me – a time when my family and I were all together in one place. These days, we are scattered across three continents. On a more practical level, I would certainly appreciate some of Switzerland’s cleanliness, natural landscapes, and political stability.

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

Unemployed after returning home from a third country

So far, Swiss citizens returning from a non-EU/EFTA country could claim unemployment benefits in Switzerland, provided they had worked 12 months within the previous 24 months. It was irrelevant where these months were spent working. Since July 1st, 2018, modified regulations apply.

If a Swiss citizen returns to Switzerland from a non-EU/EFTA country and is unemployed, he or she can register with an unemployment insurance within one year following the return. The key requirement is that the registration with the unemployment insurance take place at the latest 12 months after the return. A confirmation from the employer is required, proving that the person concerned had worked for at least twelve months during the past 24-month period. If these twelve months were spent working in Switzerland, the person is entitled to unemployment benefits. To this extent, the regulations remain the same.

What is new, is that returning citizens who have worked abroad for at least 12 months are obliged to pay contributions. In addition, they must be able to prove that they were gainfully employed (other than self-employed) in Switzerland for six months within the stated 24-month period.

For persons who have spent more than 18 months abroad that means that after their return they need to work at least six months in Switzerland before they are entitled to unemployment benefits. That can lead to difficulties for some returning citizens. It is therefore advisable to have a financial cushion.

Background

The amendment came about as part of the implementation of the so-called "Mass Immigration Initiative" (article 121b of the Federal Constitution). The article stipulates, among other things, that entitlement to social benefits by persons who immigrate to Switzerland can be limited. Within the framework of this legislation, the Unemployment Insurance Act was also changed for Swiss citizens who return from outside the EU/EFTA, and who wish to receive daily allowances with contribution waivers from the unemployment insurance.

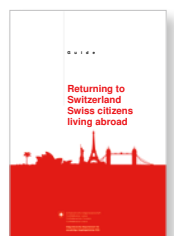


Register with the unemployment insurance within 12 months of returning home



How many months were spent working within the past 24 months and where?

Further information about emigrating and returning can be found at www.swissemigration.ch and in our publications.



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itineris

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



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These three examples help to illustrate the new legislation.

Example 1:

Ms Meier was in South Africa for eight months working in a hotel. Before she left, she was a hotel director in Switzerland. After the eight months she returned to Switzerland. But she has not found any work yet. Can she apply for unemployment benefits?

Answer: Yes, because Ms Meier can claim 12 months of employment subject to contributions in Switzerland. However, she needs to apply within four months of her return. Otherwise, the 12 months of work will no longer be within the 24-month period.

Example 2:

After 30 years of working as a teacher, Ms Muster decides to go on a trip around the world. She travels throughout South America for one year, ultimately settling down in Argentina. There she takes up work as a teacher. After 10 months she returns to Switzerland and is now looking for a job. On her return, does Ms Muster fulfill the prescribed conditions of the unemployment act?

Answer: No, since there were not enough months of gainful employment abroad within the past 24 months. Ms. Muster would only be entitled to unemployment benefits, if she had been working twelve months in Argentina, and in addition to that – either before her trip or after her return – if she was employed for six months in Switzerland.

Example 3:

Mr Müller lived in Brazil. He had been working there for three years. Now he has decided to return to Switzerland. The job search is proving difficult, and Mr Müller cannot find a job immediately. Can he claim unemployment benefits?

Answer: Not immediately. Mr. Müller needs to have employment subject to contributions in Switzerland for at least six months within a year of his return and prior to registering with the unemployment insurance.

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Federal referendums

Proposals submitted to a popular vote are determined by the Federal Council at least four months before the voting date. The following proposals will be put to the vote on 25 November 2018:

- Popular initiative of 23 March 2016 “For the dignity of agricultural animals (The Horned Cow Initiative)”
- Popular initiative of 12 August 2016 “Swiss law instead of foreign judges (Self-Determination Initiative)”
- Amendment of 16 March 2018 to the Federal Act on General Aspects of Social Security Law (GSSLA) (Statutory basis for monitoring claimants)

Voting dates in 2019:

10 February, 19 May, 20 October, 24 November

All information on the proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by parliament and the Federal Council, electronic voting, etc.) can be found at www.admin.ch/votes.

Popular initiatives

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

- “No to factory farming in Switzerland (Factory Farming Initiative)” (12 December 2019)
- “Occupational pensions – work instead of poverty” (10 January 2020)

The list of pending popular initiatives can be found in German at www.bk.admin.ch > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen



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www.fdfa.admin.ch Siena (2018)

The flying photographer



Walter Mittelholzer beside the Fokker on the Kilimanjaro flight, 15 December 1929 to 28 February 1930

Walter Mittelholzer, son of a baker from St. Gallen, did an apprenticeship as a photographer. Then he became a military and civilian pilot and ultimately a great pioneer in aviation. Throughout his life he combined flying with photography. In 1926 he flew together with a geologist, a mechanic and the writer René Gouzy by seaplane from Zurich to Cape Town. The flight, an adventurous undertaking, took 76 days. Mittelholzer documented each leg photographically – and sent the photos while underway to newspapers and magazines in Switzerland. As co-founder of Swissair in 1931, he became a national hero.

The exhibition "The Flying Photographer" about Mittelholzer can be seen at the Swiss National Museum in Zurich until 7 October 2018. www.landesmuseum.ch. The ETH Library preserves the photographic legacy of Mittelholzer. More than 18,000 pictures are available online. <http://ba.e-pics.ethz.ch>



Portrait of a barber in Marrakesh, taken on the Lake Chad flight, 1930–31



The North Face of the Eiger at a height of 3,800 metres, taken in 1919; and sand dunes of the Sahara, taken in 1930.



Mittelholzer personally delivered a decommissioned Swissair plane to the emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie (1934).



Road bridge in Péroilles near Fribourg, taken in 1926



The pyramids of Gizeh, taken on the Kilimanjaro flight, 1929–30

The vanished crocodile and other losses



MARTIN MEYER:
 "Gerade gestern: Vom allmählichen Verschwinden des Gewohnten", (Just Yesterday: About the Gradual Disappearance of the Familiar), Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich 2018, 320 pages, CHF 36.90

Once there were crocodiles on the Gotthard. They were not dangerous reptiles, but mighty goods locomotives. With their long, powerful nose sections, they were not dissimilar to the feared creatures. Seeing one of those monsters creeping up the ramps, bridges and spiral tunnels of the old Gotthard Line was "a special occasion": "The rotating rods produced a rhythmic hooting noise, the centre section appeared to be perpetually shuddering and shaking. (...) The lamps attached to the train's bogies scouted alertly." In the 1980s, however, the reptiles-on-rails had to give way to technical progress.

In his book, Martin Meyer traces in 86 brief texts many techniques, items, customs, manners, fashions, cultural aspects, figures of speech and phenomena of all types that have

disappeared over the past 10, 20 or 30 years. Things that were still there "Gerade gestern" (the book's title), just yesterday. An opportunity for Meyer, born in 1951, to reflect on the "gradual disappearance of the familiar".

"Gradual" is the key word with Meyer: sudden huge upheavals are rare in history. Changes in everyday life usually happen slowly, covertly, until one day you realise that something is just not there anymore. The pipe-smoker, for instance, whom one seldom sees these days. Or the playboy, who has died out – or at least the term is no longer used. Postcards, despite the smartphone and selfie cult, are still available as before, but how often do posted summer holiday greetings land in our letter boxes?

The object of each short text often serves simply as a springboard for precise observations of everyday life, for deep reflection. Even the North Face of the Eiger in the Berner Oberland gives Meyer occasion for existential analytical observations. Once the 1,800-metre-high rock face was "the perfect stage for horror fantasy"; countless tragic dramas had been observed by the public through telescopes and field glasses. But it is no longer the grand stage for mountaineers, at some point the North Face also "vanished". Mountaineers no longer struggle with the vertical over days, but thanks to modern equipment, ascend the face frequently in only a few hours.

Meyer is neither a cultural pessimist nor nostalgic. Yet the author cannot always conceal a touch of melancholy. But he has wrapped it in some beautiful text.

JÜRIG MÜLLER

Rising doubtfully to the top



SEBASTIAN BOHREN
 J. S. Bach:
 Sonatas & Partitas,
 BWV 1004–1006,
 RCA/Sony 2018.
 Equal: Beethoven:
 Violin Concerto; Mozart
 und Schubert, Chamber
 Artists, Sony 2015

He is fond of big words, which makes him seem pompous at times. Those who do not listen closely to violinist Sebastian Bohren, born in Winterthur in 1987, might even think they are faced with a master of exaggeration who has been given an extra dose of self-confidence. Nothing could be further from the truth. All his successes – including with his Stradivari Quartet and as a soloist – are the culmination of countless nights of self-doubt, something he does not hold back in conversation. But if a musician no longer doubts, he should no longer pick up his instrument. That will never happen to Bohren. He tries, triumphs – and dismisses the doubt.

This summer he debuted at the Lucerne Festival and recorded a solo sonata and two partitas by J. S. Bach: the CD is a pinnacle of violin literature – works full of simplicity and perfection. Bohren performs them with radiant self-perception. The tone is full, the stroke strong and the slurs superb. But one hears the doubt here, too: at one point he seems to get carried away only to quickly return more powerful and relaxed. It is as if he is asking himself: this could this be heavenly, couldn't it?

Three years ago Bohren took on another big challenge for violinists. At that time he threw himself fully into a CD recording of Ludwig van Beethoven's Violin Concerto, showing tremendous respect for the favourite work of all violinists and vast knowledge of all the recordings of his great role models Gidon Kremer, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Nathan Milstein etc. He succeeded in producing something fundamentally his own. To escape from the sterile atmosphere of the studio, the orchestra and soloist spent a week on the Rheinau music island. There they encouraged each other to deliver peak performances in front of the rehearsal audience. A satisfied Bohren stated, "You have to realise that there are people at work here for whom playing is a matter of life and death."

With all his doubts and musing, Bohren can clearly define his strengths. He knows that no one ascends to the violin throne by being modest. Those who experience Bohren in concert, experience an artist who performs with veneration, and precisely for that reason with such conviction. Bohren wrestles with the work, caresses it, quarrels and becomes one with it: every note is an act of adoration. This is true of the Beethoven CD just as the new Bach CD. This is not something that will appeal to those seeking smooth perfection.

CHRISTIAN BERZINS

Dimitri Rougy



Young activist sparks small revolution: that is the canned version of 21-year-old Dimitri Rougy's life story. Since March 2018, the independent campaigner and student of cultural studies, who was previously little known on the national scene, has risen to become a Swiss political star. Almost singlehandedly, he organised the referendum against social detectives that will be put to the vote on 25 November 2018 (see page 12). Here is how it came about: multi-prize-winning author Sibylle Berg ranted on Twitter about the social detective law passed by parliament in March 2018. Rougy chimed in. He contacted parties and organisations but with no success – none of them wanted anything to do with a referendum. Then we will just have to go it alone, Rougy and Berg told themselves.

Rougy orchestrated it all online. Within three months 50,000 signatures had to be collected. The two-person democratic guerrilla shock troop searched for donations and signature collectors via an online collection platform. Soon there were 11,000 online supporters. In July 2018, 55,861 signatures were submitted. For the first time, a referendum petition that had its origin in social media had become a success. Political analysts speak of a possible sea change if it is no longer only the big parties and organisations who can call for a referendum, but thanks to digital democracy, also small, spontaneous citizens' movements.

Dimitri Rougy's political engagement is nothing new. With a colleague he founded the Berner Oberland Youth Parliament and sits for the Social Democratic Party (SP) on the Interlaken Municipal Council. Always on the go, he organised, among other things, the demonstration against Donald Trump at the World Economic Forum 2018 in Davos. And following the November 2015 Paris attacks, he virtually singlehandedly organised the illumination of the parliament building in Bern in the colours of the French tricolour. Now he is giving Swiss domestic politics a few striking splashes of colour. JÜRIG MÜLLER

Switzerland – world champ in innovation

Switzerland is the most innovative country in the world – for the eighth time in a row. That's according to the annual ranking published by the World Intellectual Property Organization. What determined the top ranking was, in part, Switzerland's high investment in research and development as well as its technological excellence. Switzerland did well primarily in the area of patents and intellectual property. Following right behind Switzerland in the ranks are the Netherlands, Sweden, Great Britain and Singapore.

(JM)

More modern, colourful and balanced

All those who voted on 23 September noticed it: the Federal Council has changed the way it informs the public about proposals submitted to the vote of the people. The voting booklet it issues has a new, more colourful layout and the content has been changed. A new element is the column for readers in a hurry who want to be informed at a glance. Initiative and referendum committees are now given the same amount of space as the Federal Council to present their arguments: the information is thus more politically balanced. By making these changes, the Federal Council is taking new reading habits into account and attempting to improve the knowledge of voters.

(MUL)

Tiger mosquito invades Switzerland

The tiger mosquito was originally a native of the tropical areas of South and Southeast Asia. In the meantime, however, the mosquito has spread worldwide – including to Switzerland – through the transport of goods and tourist travel. More than 20 years ago it established itself in Ticino. Now it can also be found north of the Alps. Most recently it was sighted in the Basel area. The tiger mosquito is feared because it can transmit the Zika virus or dengue fever, among others. Since these diseases are rare in Switzerland, though, the risk of infection is low.

(JM)

Switzerland sweats

For Switzerland, this summer which is drawing to an end has been one of the most problematic on meteorological record. In many places temperatures rose above records set in 2003. Lack of precipitation aggravated the situation. Meteorologists spoke of it being the summer with the lowest amount of precipitation in 100 years, which brought with it a high risk of wildfire. The consequences for Swiss agriculture cannot yet be assessed. Water temperatures rose in many places to a life-threatening level for native fish. In view of the high temperatures, river water-cooled nuclear power plants had to scale down their operations.

(MUL)



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