

# SWISS REVIEW

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad  
April 2022



**Switzerland and China –  
it's complicated**

**Switzerland's biggest apartment block –  
very long and surprisingly functional**

**From guns to paintings –  
Zurich's controversial art collection**

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# Olympic dilemma

- 4 Mailbag
- 6 Focus  
Switzerland and China – the story of two uncomfortable bedfellows
- 10 Images  
Meret Oppenheim
- 12 Swiss extremes  
A visit to Switzerland's longest residential building
- 15 Literature  
How Edmond Fleg captured the beauty of Judaism in words
- 16 Covid-19  
The winter of high case numbers
- News from your region
- 17 Politics  
Swiss electorate to vote on EU border protection
- 20 Society  
Organ donation – no longer a question of explicit consent?
- 22 Culture  
Zurich and its “plundered” art collection
- 24 Switzerland in figures
- 25 SwissCommunity news
- 27 Notes from the Federal Palace
- 30 Books / Sounds
- 31 Top pick / News



Switzerland's Olympic heroes have most likely put their hard-earned Beijing medals aside by now and are already looking ahead to training for the next winter season. But let us take a quick look back at the Games for a moment. Unusually, not one member of the Swiss government was there in Beijing to congratulate our gold medal winners. Neither the sports minister, Viola Amherd, nor the president of the Swiss

Confederation, Ignazio Cassis.

It's a bit complicated. The Swiss government had long been pondering whether to send a diplomatic delegation to the Olympics. As you may remember, several countries including the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand had already decided not to send any government representatives to Beijing. What would the Swiss do? Join the diplomatic boycott, because Berne naturally also abhors China's policy on minorities and human rights? Or travel to China regardless – as a sign of respect towards Switzerland's third-biggest trading partner?

Finally, the Federal Council announced on a cold and foggy January day that it would not be travelling to China. Not out of protest, but because its members were needed at home due to the Covid situation, and because diplomatic meetings in Beijing were not possible anyway. This was not the most convincing of excuses.

History has shown how delicate relations between Berne and Beijing can be. Back in 1950, Switzerland became one of the first Western nations to start developing ties with the People's Republic. Yet the association with China has always been complicated – and could get trickier still. As we explain in this edition's Focus article, Switzerland's deliberately pragmatic approach to China is under scrutiny. Switzerland's protestations of neutrality are increasingly untenable, given how forthright on China its neighbours and friends have become. Sooner or later, Berne will also have to nail its colours to the mast. Simply saying that pragmatism and neutrality should not be mistaken for indifference and opportunism is unlikely to work in the long term.

Despite all the politicking, it would be remiss of us not to mention some of Switzerland's most brilliant Winter Olympians. You will find their “gold-etched” names at the end of this magazine.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cover photo: By Max Spring,  
the “Swiss Review” cartoonist

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

**Swiss  
Community**

## Hydropower has lost its clean image



We focus too little on electricity consumption. Electricity wastage should come at a price. Inefficient machines, equipment and lighting should be subject to a penalty tax. We currently waste too much energy, because this energy is easily available and relatively inexpensive. How many electrical appliances does your household have?

ANDRE ZIMMERMANN, TOKYO JAPAN

Here we are with our backs against the wall (not of the dam, but of climate change!), where we see that each solution has its grey areas and its disadvantages. We will only be able to reach informed and agreed-upon solutions through dialogue.

CLAUDE ROCHAT, CHALON S/S, FRANCE

Climate change isn't just causing a change in which season the 'run-off' happens. And that glaciers are melting into lakes. Whether or not the supply of water is natural or artificial doesn't matter, insofar that the amounts are substantially less... this not only affects the views, the species that are already endangered and others that would become so (like us for lack of water to drink and for agriculture to feed us), but the very futile wish of producing electricity in this manner!

MARC PETITPIERRE, USA

It is not only a question of the dams in the mountains. We can use modern technology relatively discreetly to harness energy anywhere water flows. France recently decided to tap into minor hydropower sources again – flour mills, sawmills, etc. Or take the Aabach as an example – this small river in the canton of Lucerne used to provide energy for an entire industrial area before flowing into Lake Greifen.

JEAN THOMAS WEBER, ST. GENGOUX-LE-NATIONAL, FRANCE

In my opinion, it is not possible to tackle climate change without taking personal saving decisions and thinking outside the box for transport. Hydrogen engines can power all vehicles. But we keep thinking all-electric for cars, at the risk of a future shortage of spare batteries. Having lived in Valais for 35 years, I think that dams are essential, but that they have to be better connected to the protection of nature, with a sufficient flow in the rivers.

LAMPO MARC, LAMPERTHEIM, FRANCE

There is no other way to resolve the issue other than investing in nuclear energy again. This time, we clearly need to focus on getting our research right and recycling the radioactive waste. No one wants wind turbines built everywhere, because they devalue property, kill birds and spoil the landscape.

RICH WALTERS, TODTMOOS, GERMANY

We need to think more about what is easiest from a technological viewpoint. Water again is the answer – or hydrogen, to be precise. The hydrogen combustion engine is proven to be suited to large-scale facilities in permanent locations, as well as trucks, trains and ships. The problem with this? The mains water needed for it is simply too cheap, which is not what the world's overblown energy sector wants. The powers that be search frantically for expensive, fixed-price sources of alternative energy instead.

ARYE-ISAAC OPHIR, ISRAEL

## How Julius Maggi took kitchens by storm



What a fantastic article! I have been the cook in our family since 1970 and I could not possibly exist without Maggi seasoning. Years ago we went through a period here in Brisbane when you couldn't get Maggi. Talking to a Swiss friend, a chef, he suggested just using soy sauce. It's just not the same. I was so glad when the famous bottle appeared once again on our supermarket shelves.

BILL BOHLEN, AUSTRALIA

Excellent article, short but very informative. Like others that you regularly publish, it enables us to add a bit of spice and diversity to the topics of conversation that often arise when we reveal our citizenship abroad: banks, riches, (expensive) watches, etc... Thank you!

ARNAUD CARASSO, MOSCOW, RUSSIA

Truly a success story from a commercial perspective. It is a shame the article didn't mention that Maggi, flavoursome though it is, does not contain the healthiest of ingredients these days. Now more than ever, it is important that consumers are informed of what they are consuming. In my view, the initial scepticism shows that people back then knew that food coming from a bottle and made in a factory could never be healthy.

HEDWIG KRASEVAC, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

I drove my mother crazy when I was young, because I always showered my food with gallons of Maggi. I still keep a bottle today – and regularly use it. Does that make me a bad cook?

BENNY MEIER, WALDGIRMES, GERMANY

Your article reminds me of the thick blue cookbook that my grandmother always used. And I had no idea that there was no 'Maggi-Kraut' (lovable) in Maggi at all.

RUTH PFISTER, TRURO, CANADA

I don't think that I ever made a salad, a soup or a stew without Maggi. I have always carried Maggi with me on my travels, if it was through the wet tropical rainforests of Papua New Guinea or the bush here in Australia. Maggi is still being sold in big bottles in many Asian grocery stores.

BEAT ODERMATT, ADELAIDE, AUSTRALIA

A very interesting article and a great story about industry. It is often remarkable to note that concepts like marketing, influencers and a number of the others mentioned already existed. What changed is that in between, marketing has been conceptualised and is now almost a science. Thank you for this effort.

FRANCOIS MONTANDON, ORVAULT, FRANCE

We need to thank Julius Maggi for the contribution he made to eating habits around the world. A remarkable story.

ÖNDER ERDOGAN, ÇORUM, TURKEY

My children and grandchildren love Maggi too. I keep a large bottle in the kitchen cupboard, so that I can continue replenishing my smaller bottle.

HULDA SHURTLEFF-NYDEGGER, HOWELL MI, USA

## In the shadow of the Gotthard tunnel

Without doubt, that was one of the best articles that I have read to date. Many thanks!

THOMAS LAUPER, BAGUIO, PHILIPPINES

After the breakthrough of the railway tunnel, one of the Italian construction workers decided to go all the way to the German-speaking side. He ended up in the Muota Valley, where he eventually got married and created an extra branch on our family tree. It is thanks to him and the tunnel that I am alive.

PETER OCHSNER, NAIROBI, KENYA

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**IMPRINT:**  
“Swiss Review”, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 48<sup>th</sup> year of publication and is published in German, French, English and Spanish in 14 regional editions. It has a total circulation of 431,000, including 253,000 electronic copies. Regional news appears four times a year. The ordering parties

are fully responsible for the content of advertisements and promotional inserts. This content does not necessarily represent the opinion of either the editorial office or the publisher.  
EDITORS: Marc Lettau (MUL), Editor-in-Chief; Stéphane Herzog (SH); Theodora Peter (TP); Susanne Wenger (SWE); Consular Directorate, Innovation

and Partnerships, responsible for the “Notes from the Federal Palace” section.  
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Sandra Krebs  
TRANSLATION: SwissGlobal Language Services AG; LAYOUT: Joseph Haas, Zürich; PRINT: Vogt-Schild Druck AG, 4552 Derendingen  
POSTAL ADDRESS: Publisher, editorial

office, advertising: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Tel.: +41313566110.  
Account: IBAN CH97 0079 0016 1294 4609 8 / KBBECH22  
Email: revue@swisscommunity.org

COPY DEADLINE for this edition:  
9 February 2022

All Swiss Abroad who are registered with a Swiss representation receive the magazine free of charge. Anyone else can subscribe to the magazine for an annual fee (Switzerland: CHF 30 / abroad: CHF 50). Subscribers are sent the magazine direct from Berne.  
www.revue.ch

CHANGES TO DELIVERY: Please advise your local embassy or consulate. The editorial team cannot access your address and administrative data.



# Switzerland and China – a mutually beneficial but uneasy relationship

Swiss-Chinese bilateral relations date back to 1950. But dealings between our small democracy and the communist superpower are a little complicated – and are likely to become even trickier, with Switzerland under increasing pressure to nail its colours to the mast as geopolitical divisions widen.

EVELINE RUTZ

The response from China was immediate. Switzerland should keep out of our internal affairs, said the Chinese ambassador in Berne, Wang Shiting, in March 2021, referring to what he called “groundless accusations” and “fake news”. This was a few days after Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis had presented the Federal Council’s future strategy on China, a pitch that also saw him addressing Beijing’s human rights record and treatment of minorities. In unusually stark language, Cassis had criticised the Chinese regime’s “increasingly authoritarian tendencies”. Some in Switzerland were in ideological confrontation mode, Wang retorted. “This is not conducive to Swiss-Chinese relations.”

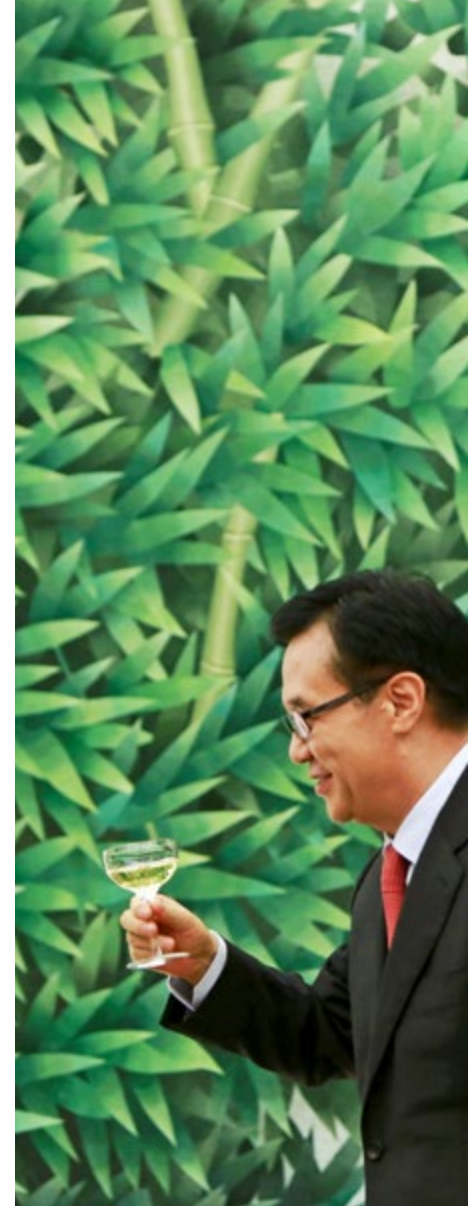
## Early rapprochement

Swiss-Chinese relations have a long tradition. They are multi-faceted and complicated. In 1950, Switzerland became one of the first Western nations to recognise the Maoist people’s republic. It has maintained broad-based bilateral relations with Beijing since the 1980s. For some 30 years, Berne has also been supporting projects that promote expertise and technology sharing. Current projects include development work to help China combat

climate change. Since 1991, Switzerland and China have also been conducting a human rights dialogue that involves the two countries’ foreign ministers engaging in an annual round of talks on the human rights situation in China. However, these talks stalled in 2019 after Berne co-signed a letter at the United Nations objecting to China’s treatment of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

## One of Switzerland’s most important trading partners

Economic ties have always been particularly important to the Swiss-Chinese dynamic. Lift and escalator manufacturer Schindler played a pioneering role in this regard. In 1980, the Lucerne-based company became the first Western enterprise to conclude an industrial joint venture in China. Schindler now has six sites in the country, where it is profiting from the Chinese urban construction boom and has a hand in numerous prestigious building projects. China is currently Switzerland’s third most important trading partner after Germany and the USA. Switzerland was the first country in mainland Europe to sign a free trade agreement with the Asian giant. The deal, which came into force in 2014, gives Switzerland a number of competitive advantages.

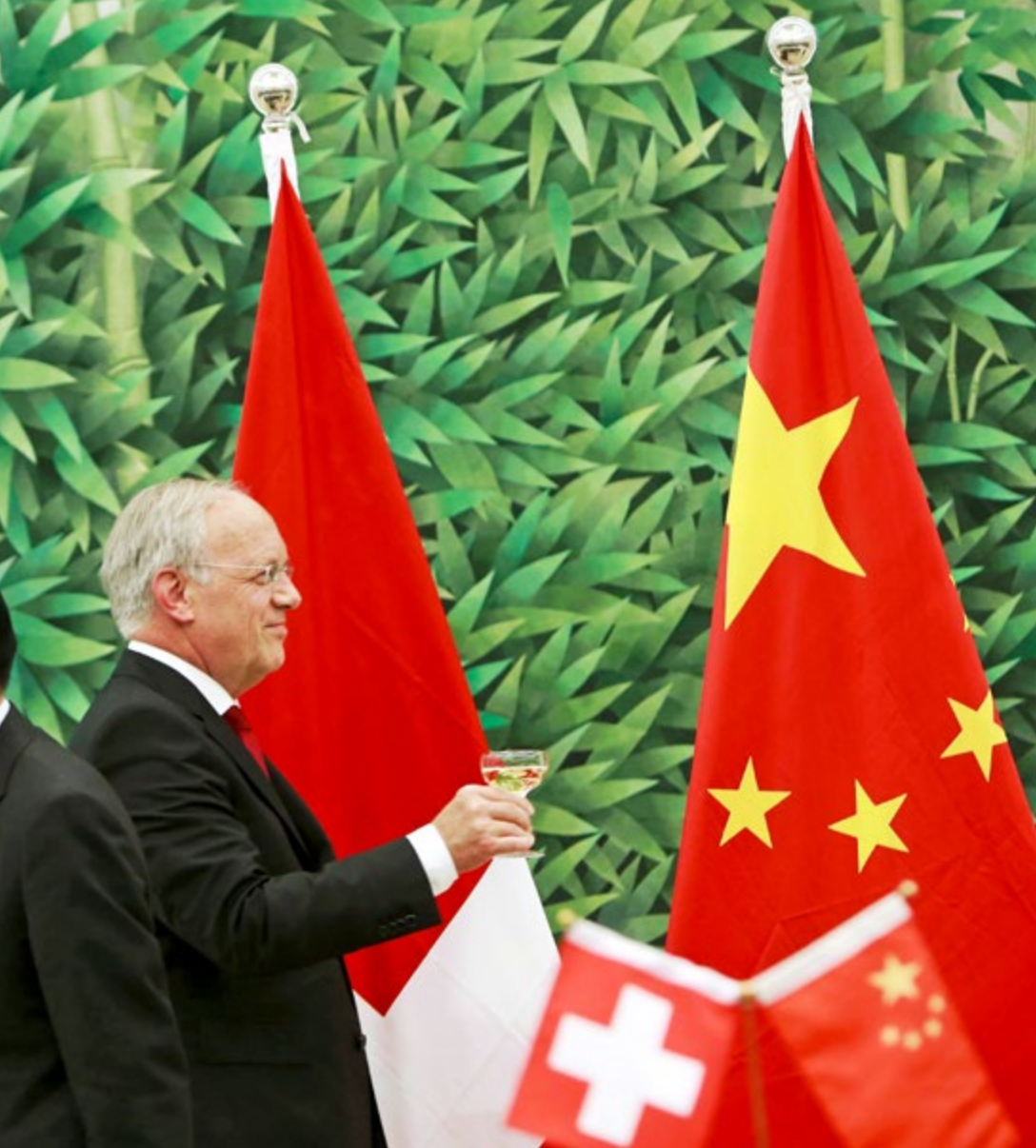


For example, Swiss companies enjoy improved access to the Chinese market and are able to export duty-free and at reduced tariffs.

## Appealing for China

Both sides are proud of the pioneering nature of their bilateral relations. The Swiss government believes its role is to build bridges with China. It prefers to engage in “constructive, critical dialogue” and is reluctant to voice criticism or broach the prospect of sanctions. Berne wants to effect change by working with, not against, China. The various ties between Switzerland and China are politically appealing for the Beijing government, which regards neutral Switzerland as a link – and gateway – to Europe.

Both countries regularly interact at the highest political level. Even so,



there have been hiccups in the past. Many Swiss will remember Jiang Zemin's state visit in 1999. The president of China struggled to contain his anger at the sight and sound of Tibetan sympathisers in the centre of Berne exercising their democratic right to protest, as regularly happens in Switzerland. Keeping the Swiss government waiting, a visibly angered Jiang then cut the official reception short. His host, the then Swiss President Ruth Dreifuss, later continued on the theme of human rights, infuriating Jiang further. "You have lost a friend," he said.

### Beijing's long reach

Yet friction is not only confined to the political stage. Chinese corporate and property acquisitions, not to mention Chinese investment in Swiss football,

are a source of unease in Switzerland. Perhaps more than any other state apparatus, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) tries to control how the world perceives it. In Switzerland, too, the CCP puts systematic and significant effort into monitoring the conversation on China among expatriates, at educational establishments, in economic circles and even in cultural life. CCP representatives also attend public events. Notably, they caused a stir at a University of Zurich function by taking photographs after participants began asking questions considered inappropriate by the CCP. The Chinese embassy in Berne intervened when students at the Zurich University of the Arts made a film about the protests in Hong Kong. In 2021, the case of a PhD student at the University of St Gallen (HSG) also made headlines. The student had used Twitter to criticise

**Inadvertently symbolic – Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang 'meets' Federal Councillor and economics minister Johann Schneider-Ammann in Beijing (2013).**

Photo: Keystone

the Chinese government, after which his professor wanted nothing more to do with him. Following his stay at a Chinese university, the young man tried in vain to re-enrol at St Gallen. The dispute ended with the student having to get a job that had nothing to do with the three years that he had spent on his doctorate. The HSG, which nurtures ties with universities in China through exchange programmes as well as training and research projects, has since announced its intention to address perils such as uncontrolled knowledge sharing and self-censorship.

### Self-censorship in the field of research

Ralph Weber, a professor at the Institute for European Global Studies at the University of Basel, puts these incidents into a wider context. He believes there is a structural problem affecting many universities in Europe. "Self-censorship becomes an issue for any academic who comes into contact with an authoritarian regime," he says, adding that China is putting increasing pressure not only on educational establishments, but on companies and policy-makers too. Weber, a political scientist, has studied how the Chinese government exerts influence in Switzerland. "The Chinese one-party state is carrying out a systematic campaign," and has an obscure network of groups and organisations embedded in this country, he says. "This is how Beijing is try-



**The Swiss President Ruth Dreifuss greets her Chinese counterpart Jiang Zemin at Geneva Airport in 1999. Everything was going well.**



**Then the visit quickly turned sour, with Jiang accusing Dreifuss of “being unable to control her people” – the protesters outside. The Swiss president stood her ground and brought up China’s human rights situation.**

Photos: Keystone, 1999

ing to get its message through to us.” Anybody who does business in China will encounter the Communist Party. The question of how accommodating one should be to the CCP sparked debate last year when big bank Credit Suisse terminated an account held by the dissident artist Ai Weiwei. Credit Suisse cited missing paperwork as the reason. However, critics say it was more to do with Credit Suisse wanting to avoid antagonising the Chinese authorities because the bank wants to strengthen its position in the Asian market.

### Vain hopes

Bilateral relations with China have always been fraught with dilemma. Left-

wing parties and organisations within civil society refuse to cooperate with a regime that “suppresses minorities”, as the federal government has officially put it. For years, they have decried Beijing’s treatment of dissidents, Tibetans, Uyghurs, and the inhabitants of Hong Kong. Condemnation and calls for a tougher response have grown louder of late, with related motions proliferating in parliament.

In autumn, national politicians debated whether to add a chapter on human and social rights to the free trade agreement. “Unfortunately, hopes that economic liberation would also lead to advances in democracy and human rights have been in vain,” said Lucerne National Councillor Roland Fischer (Green Liberals). He ar-

gues that the long-standing human rights dialogue has had little effect. In reply, Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin said the clamour for binding clauses was counterproductive. “We would reach an impasse,” he warned, “And we would shut the door on conversations with China on all of these important issues.”

### Pragmatic – or opportunistic?

In its new strategy, the Federal Council says Switzerland wishes to build bridges, exploit opportunities and address problems openly. The federal government wants to apply a cogent framework to Switzerland’s diverse ties with China, continuing with its tailored approach to China while emphasising Swiss neutrality. At the same time, it is committed to “integrating China into the liberal international order and involving it in efforts to resolve global challenges”. Sounds simple. “But the wording is ambiguous,” says Weber. It is unclear how the government wishes to go about implementing its strategy. Then again, this dilemma has dogged Switzerland for decades, “ever since it decided, for perfectly valid reasons, to do business with an authoritarian regime but remain true to its values”. Switzerland’s policy on China is pragmatic – but you can also call it opportunistic, he adds.

### Swiss strategy under pressure

It is indeed becoming increasingly difficult for Switzerland to justify its neutral stance. China’s bid for global influence has put the world on guard. The USA sharpened its rhetoric significantly under Donald Trump, initiating a trade war. Joe Biden has toned down the language, but he is just as unequivocal. In November 2021, he



warned Chinese President Xi Jinping against choosing the path of confrontation. During a virtual summit with his counterpart, the US president said that economic competition should not “veer into conflict” and that all countries must abide by the same rules.

Last year, the EU imposed sanctions against Chinese officials in protest at what it called the “arbitrary detention” of Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Beijing hit back immediately with its own sanctions against MEPs and European scientists. The regime also resorted to countermeasures amid criticism of its Covid strategy – restricting trade with Australia, for example, after the Canberra government had supported calls to investigate the origins of Covid-19. “China has polarised global opinion since the pandemic began,” noted the Swiss intelligence service, the FIS, in its 2020 situation report, adding that China’s international image had suffered. In this report, the FIS outlined the risk posed by cyberattacks and Chinese espionage. The latter was a “significant threat to Switzerland”, it warned. In other words, neutrality is reaching the limits of its effectiveness as far as China is concerned.

## Discussions over a diplomatic boycott

Switzerland’s policy on China made news again before the Winter Olympics, when the USA, Canada, the UK, and Australia announced a diplomatic boycott, with a handful of European nations following suit. It was impossible to cheer on the athletes without thinking about the situation on the ground in China, lamented the Zurich National Councillor Fabian Molina (SP). “It is not the right time to be celebrating a country in which crimes

**Swiss journalist and photographer Walter Bosshard did his bit for Chinese rapprochement with the West. The photos that he took between 1930 and 1939 are today considered part of China’s visual heritage. Bosshard met Mao Zedong in 1938.**  
Photo: Keystone



against humanity are currently being committed,” he said. Instead, the federal government had to send out a strong message and refrain from dispatching an official delegation to Beijing. Christoph Wiedmer, co-director of the Society for Threatened Peoples, also expressed support for a boycott, saying that firmness was needed to make any headway. “The extent of China’s human rights violations in Tibet and Xinjiang is shocking. Beijing will not stop suppressing minorities unless it faces considerable international pressure – as we learned when

it hosted the Summer Olympics in 2008.” The Federal Council reacted hesitantly to these demands, before eventually stating that it would be “appropriate” for a government representative to attend the opening ceremony in Beijing. However, it gave itself leeway by referring to the pandemic. “The visit will not go ahead if the Covid situation in Switzerland requires all the Federal Councillors to be in Switzerland,” said the Federal Council spokesman. At the end of January, the government decided to stay away from the opening ceremony after all.

**In 1980, Lucerne-based lift manufacturer Schindler became the first Western company to agree an industrial joint venture in China. It is now profiting from the Chinese urban construction boom.** Photo: iStock



## Sipping from a furry teacup

Since 1983, Waisenhausplatz (Orphanage Square), just around the corner from the Berne Museum of Fine Arts 200 metres away, has been home to “The Spiral Column” – a fountain that artist Meret Oppenheim (1913–85) created two years before her death. Water drips down the tower-like structure, now covered at the top in plants, mosses and lichens. Icicles form when the water freezes.

Initial reaction to the artist’s work was also chilly. Locals called it the “column of shame”, or even the “urinal”. The fountain was certainly a talking point. It also showed how little the world-renowned Meret Oppenheim cared about

what other people thought of her work. Almost 40 years later, the Berne Museum of Fine Arts has been hosting a retrospective of this incredible woman who lived in the Swiss capital for so long. Entitled “My Exhibition”, the show provides a wide-ranging appreciation of Oppenheim’s immeasurable body of work. Oppenheim used almost every material in the book. It was her 1936 furry teacup (“Object”) that won plaudits from the outset. Oppenheim thought this iconic work was just quite strange, whereas the art world fell over itself to imbue the teacup with meaning.

Meret Oppenheim was labelled a surrealist. However, visitors to “My Exhibition” will dis-



*My Nurse, 1936/1967*

Metal platter, shoes, string, and paper; 14 x 33 x 21 cm

Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Photo: Albin Dahlström; 2021, © ProLitteris, Zurich



This work was missing from the exhibition in Berne:  
Meret Oppenheim, "Object",  
Paris, 1936. MoMA  
Artists Rights Society, New York / Pro Litteris, Zurich

cover a fascinating array of original works by an artist who refused to be pigeonholed – and who suffered from artist's block for years but never lost her self-deprecating style. One of her works, "My Nurse", shows a pair of women's high-heeled shoes trussed together like a chicken and "served" sole side up on a silver platter.

"Freedom is not given to you – you have to take it," Oppenheim once said. She never veered from this ethos. Her furry teacup was missing from the exhibition in Berne – she probably would have been relieved to hear.

JÜRIG STEINER

Tour of "My Exhibition" by television presenter Ueli Schmetzer (in Swiss German): [revue.link/oppenheim](https://www.revue.link/oppenheim)

After its Berne residency, "My Exhibition" will be housed at The Menil Connection in Houston, USA (25 March to 18 September 2022) before moving to the Museum of Modern Art in New York (30 October 2022 to 4 March 2023).



Spring Day, 1961  
Oil on plastic material and wood with wire basket, 50 x 34 cm  
Private collection  
© 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich



Six Clouds on a Bridge, 1975  
Bronze; 46,8 x 61 x 15,5 cm  
Kunstmuseum Bern, Meret Oppenheim Bequest  
Photo: Peter Lauri, Berne, © 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich



Squirrel, 1960/1969  
Beer glass, plastic foam and fur; 21.5 x 13 x 7.5 cm  
Kunstmuseum Bern  
Photo: Peter Lauri, Berne, © 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich



## Switzerland's biggest building wears its 60 years well

Le Lignon's central building measures over 1 km. It is the largest rental complex in Switzerland. There is a real quality of life in this neighbourhood of 6,500 inhabitants, but there are also certain tensions between older residents, newcomers and young adults.

STEPHANE HERZOG

It was the year 1974. Michèle Finger remembers her arrival in Lignon, in the canton of Geneva. She was in the car with the man who was to become her husband. The urban development stretched out before her: one kilometre in length, 2,780 homes and 84 streets. "It was unimaginable, immense. I just couldn't imagine a building so big," she recalls. Once inside, Michèle felt reassured. "My partner was living in a four-room flat. It was well laid out and full of light. The

view was magnificent and the flat was completely overlooked. It was strange, but we didn't feel like we were stuck inside a housing project," says this former accountant, originally from Porrentruy. Time passed, the children moved out and now Michèle and her husband are preparing to move into a house under socio-medical supervision. But they won't be going far from Le Lignon.

Genevan developer and architect, Georges Addor (1920-1982), head of this project which was originally in-



Higher, further, faster, more beautiful?

In search of the somewhat different Swiss records. This edition: Switzerland's biggest – and longest – residential building.

tended to house up to 10,000 people, would have been delighted to hear Michèle's words. "People's happiness. This is the main concern for an architect building a complex of this size," he stated in 1966 before RTS (TV channel in western Switzerland) cameras. "Once a person has understood that they will have four neighbours around them, 15 floors above or below won't change a thing," explains Addor, scion of the canton's real estate elite. "He was a left-winger in a Maserati," says the architect Jean-Paul Jaccaud, when



**Teenagers and graffiti – part of the Le Lignon tapestry.**

Photo: Stéphane Herzog

**The residential complex stretches out like a snake.**

Photo: Ben Zurbriggen

describing Addor. His office took part in the energy refurbishment of 1,200 apartments in Le Lignon, a project which was awarded a prize at the end of 2021 by the German-language magazine “Hochparterre” and the Zurich museum for design. The work was spread over ten years and cost 100 million Swiss francs.

### Quick and functional construction

Everything about the story of Le Lignon is impressive. To start with, the project was set up in record time. We are 5 km from the centre of Vernier. There was space to build in the area designated by the canton for development without creating an urban sprawl. During the first stage, between 1963 and 1967, 1,846 apartments were completed. “Today, such

speed would be unthinkable, just like the design of a project like this, in fact,” observes Jaccaud. The creation was modern and functional. The canton and the municipality of Vernier aimed for social diversity. The great snake of Le Lignon, with its streets sloping gently towards the Rhône, offers identically designed apartments, whether for social housing or private ownership. All of the properties offer front and rear views. The prices vary depending on size and floor. As an example, Jean-Paul Jaccaud mentions a six-room apartment costing 2,800 francs per month.

“...like a street from the Middle Ages”

We enter the neighbourhood by passing under an archway. The inner side of the serpent is silent. We walk on, sheltered from the traffic. The car-parks are hidden below great lawns. Designed by landscape architect Walter Brugger, the public area is dotted with fountains and squares. The ground floors are open to view. A great stairway in white stone provides a gently sloping path down to the Rhône, “like a street from the Middle Ages”, says Jean-Paul Jaccaud. Georges Addor built upwards and in a line in order to make the most of the 280,000 square metres of land available for the whole project, with an identical area of habitable floor space at the end. The central building is not just long, but also very high, reaching 50 metres at some

**Such an immense building – even under a misty shroud.**

Photo: Stéphane Herzog

points. Until the 1990s, the higher of Le Lignon’s two towers was the biggest in Switzerland. “There aren’t a lot of buildings like this which have aged so well,” comments Jaccaud.

### Light, peace and quiet, and public services

On the tenth floor of the smaller of Le Lignon’s two towers, which are the complex’s prime locations, we visit an apartment which has just been renovated. The work enabled a 40 percent improvement in energy performance. The initial design was not bad, notes the Genevan architect. Having a lengthy building effectively limits the number of walls to insulate. On this January morning, the sunlight floods the rooms. The view is magnificent, with the Rhône river on one side and the Jura on the other. Another of Addor’s tricks: the two towers in question were built up from the lowest point in the land, “to avoid them becoming too prominent”, explains Jaccaud.

Everyone agrees that Le Lignon is a town set in the countryside. It also allows its inhabitants autonomy. At the heart of Le Lignon is a shopping centre on one floor. There is everything there that you could need: a



tea-room, a restaurant, a bar, a cobbler, a hairdresser, a post office, a butcher and a clinic. There is also a protestant parish building, a catholic church, a multi-sports ground, a games library, a space for teenagers and two school groups. Every Saturday, former pastor Michel Monod, who has lived here since 1973, stands between the Migros and Coop supermarkets to greet the passers-by. “Technically, it is a perfect complex,” he says, before lamenting the lack of connectivity between the inhabitants, in this urban project which is home to 100 different nationalities. “It is the reign of mass individualism,” he believes.

### Young adults in need of a sense of “home”

Monod co-manages the Le Lignon neighbourhood contract, which aims to help people to achieve community projects. Every day, he goes to a canopy located below the Le Lignon performance hall. From there, away from prying eyes, young adults from the neighbourhood meet up, and sometimes warm themselves around the fire of an improvised fire bowl. Michèle Finger knows the spot. This group of young people, who smoke and drink beer, listening to rap music, give her a feeling of insecurity, in a complex she finds increasingly unfamiliar. Of course, the Fingers’ rent is low, at only 1,200 francs for a 5-room flat, with expenses and parking included. But this resident, who is involved in several



of the neighbourhood associations, complains of the rubbish that piles up at the collection points, spit found in the lifts and the fact that young people congregate at the ends of the streets. “I don’t know the people who have recently begun renting in my building. People don’t even bother to read the neighbourhood paper anymore,” she says, highlighting the lack of interest amongst Le Lignon’s “new outsiders”.

A social worker in Le Lignon since 2012, 39-year-old Miguel Sanchez is familiar with this discourse and understands the discomfort. “With its low rental prices, Le Lignon offers a solution for people from migrant backgrounds. This ethnic and social diversity, in a generally more strained economic context, maybe makes networking more complicated than in the past,” he comments. “But Le Lignon is not a “bedroom community” like you find in France. It is well equipped and well maintained. In fact, young people are proud to live here.



**Michèle Finger’s apartment at Le Lignon – where she has been living for decades (top left).**

Foto Jean-Jacques Finger

**Former priest Michel Monod is at the complex every Saturday, helping and chatting to teenagers (centre).**

Foto Stéphane Herzog

**Imposing but mostly traffic-free – the residential parking spaces are underground (top right).**

Photo Stéphane Herzog

There have never been any big problems in terms of safety or crime. It’s more a question of incivilities,” explains the socio-cultural counsellor.

In fact, Michel Monod attributes qualities to the young people around the fire bowl that seem to be missing amongst other residents of Le Lignon: “they are extremely loyal in their friendships. People tell me ‘lock them up’; I tell them: they’re your children.” He, too, found the neighbourhood to be out of all proportion when he first arrived. “I said to myself: it’s not possible to live as if we were in a termite mound, and I made it my mission to unite the people.” But he, too, loves Le Lignon.

# A messianic longing for human happiness

Genevan Edmond Fleg extolled the greatness and beauty of Judaism during the century in which Jews faced their greatest peril. He did so most convincingly in a piece of youth literature.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

“This work will be everlasting,” said Charles Péguy. It was October 1913, and Péguy had just delivered a freshly printed copy of the latest “Cahiers de la Quinzaine” to author Edmond Fleg’s apartment at Quai-aux-Fleurs 1 on Paris’s Île de la Cité. The journal contained the first part of Fleg’s “Hear, O Israel” – a poetry cycle named after the Shema, the central prayer in the Jewish prayer book taken from three speeches that Moses delivered to the Israelites: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one”. Fleg, born in 1874, the son of a Genevan merchant, devoted himself to depicting the beauty and greatness of Judaism from its beginnings 4,000 years ago. Such was the intent of this vast epic, which eventually totalled 700 pages and was not completed until 1948. He did so after a phase in which he had distanced himself from his Jewish origins – shaken by the anti-Semitism surrounding the Dreyfus Affair.

Fleg, who lived in Paris with wife Madeleine Bernheim and his two sons, volunteered for the Foreign Legion in the

First World War and enjoyed success as a dramatist, before publishing a series of idiosyncratic religious biographies from 1928 onwards. Subjects included Moses, Solomon and even Jesus. However, his most lasting achievement was not “Hear, O Israel” but the 1926 novel “The Boy Prophet” – an admirably humorous work that helped to reconcile thousands of young Jews with their religion.

## What it means to be Jewish

“To be a Christian, you must believe that Jesus is the host and God. But what do you have to believe in to be Jewish?” Claude Lévy, the novel’s central character, is unable to answer this question. Out of sympathy, he turns to girlfriend Mariette’s Catholic faith. “After all, it was terrible what the Jews did to Jesus!” But then he learns of the

perpetual suffering and persecution of the Jews. Peeling back the austere, cultish teachings of a curious rabbi called Lobmann, he is overcome by a prophetic vision and a messianic longing for human happiness.

## Tragedy

Fleg predicted the Holocaust when an openly anti-Semitic regime rose to power in Germany, the country in which he had studied. By 1939, this terrible hunch was all too real. He then lost both his sons in quick succession during the fall of France to Germany. Daniel, the younger, drowned himself in the Seine because he had not been recruited to fight the Nazis. Maurice, the older, fell in battle against the German enemy. And as if that were not enough, he also lost his only grandson on 6 April 1940 after medics left him with the dreadful dilemma of deciding whether his daughter-in-law or her child should live.

Yet Fleg never lost hope. From his refuge in Provence after the Nazi occupation of France, he continued assimilating young Jews back to Judaism. When he died on 15 October 1963, he was considered to have played a key role in the rapprochement between Christians and Jews.

However, eight years after his death, anti-Semitism caught up with him when his entire literary estate, which was about to be sent to Israel and included all his original documents as well as letters from Proust, Mauriac, Camus and others, was stolen from the Quai aux Fleurs apartment by unknown thieves and almost certainly stashed away or destroyed. It has not been found since.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** Giò Waeckerlin-Induni’s German translation of “The Boy Prophet”, which includes a biographical afterword by Charles Linsmayer, is available from Verlag Th. Gut, Zurich (volume 21 of the “Reprinted by Huber” series). The French version is available from Gallimard, Paris, as part of the “Collection Blanche”.



“Why does God want Israel to be a nation of priests? So that the world changes. So that the world at present becomes the world as it will be when the advent of the Messiah brings peace and justice to the earth. This messianic longing is now the longing of all humankind.”

(Edmond Fleg at the closing meeting of the 1958 World Jewish Congress in Geneva)

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST BASED IN ZÜRICH

## Switzerland, the second Covid winter, and the Omicron wave

Despite voter approval of the Covid-19 Act as well as a record number of Covid cases, the Swiss government refrained from drastic measures in the Covid winter of 2021–22. The impact was less severe than in the previous winter.

The division of powers in the Swiss political system has often turned the fight against Covid-19 into an exasperatingly slow affair. However, direct democracy showed again that it can act as a much-needed outlet in times of crisis. The referendum on the Covid-19 Act at the end of November saw the electorate endorsing the government's coronavirus policy. A clear majority voted in favour of the Covid vaccine passport requirement – the most controversial of the measures introduced to combat the pandemic. It was a second, decisive defeat for opponents of the government's Covid policy, who had forced another referendum on the matter and held noisy protests on the streets.

The pandemic continues to sow discord, but at least the vote helped to defuse some of the tension. It also handed the Federal Council an anti-Covid mandate the like of which few other national governments have been given. However, Berne knows that this is no licence to do as it chooses. Its approach has been quite restrained since the time of the lockdowns. Switzerland has, in the words of Genevan epidemiologist Marcel Salathé, constantly “sailed close to the wind” throughout the pandemic. The country paid a heavy price for its strategy during the second wave in the autumn and winter of 2020–21, when excess mortality soared.

### Early end to the restrictions

One year later, the screw was initially tightened again before Christmas. Only those who could prove they had been vaccinated or had recovered from Covid were allowed entry to restaurants, cinemas, gyms, etc. This was because intensive care unit occupancy had again exceeded the critical threshold. The Delta variant was mainly causing the unvaccinated to fall seriously ill. Hospitals had to postpone operations in order to focus on caring for these patients – and had hurriedly put in place new contingency plans to resort to triage and make deeply uncomfortable life-or-death decisions on whom to treat. Meanwhile, the relatively unknown Omicron variant was starting to spread.

Yet despite the uncertain situation, the Federal Council decided against imposing stricter measures discussed in advance with the cantons. These would have included restaurant closures. The government held its course – even

as the Omicron wave in January rose as steeply as the Swiss National Covid-19 Science Task Force had forecast. And as soon as Switzerland had passed the peak (albeit with continued high levels of virus circulation), the Federal Council lifted all restrictions except for the requirement to wear masks on public transport and in healthcare institutions. Contrary to fears, hospitals were not overwhelmed. This was thanks to a higher level of immunity among the population due to vaccination and prior infection – with 30 to



40 per cent of the Swiss population having caught coronavirus during the height of the Omicron spike alone.

Hence, unlike one or two neighbouring countries, Switzerland came through the second Covid winter without another lockdown or making vaccinations mandatory, despite a relatively low vaccination rate. The Federal Council had “made a bet and won”, said the president of the Swiss Confederation, Ignazio Cassis. But it had failed to hedge the bet, say critics. Experts warn that 20 per cent of the many infected could suffer long-term symptoms. The Swiss welfare system is already feeling the strain. Last year alone, the national disability insurance scheme recorded 1,700 new claimants suffering from long Covid. (SWE)

Although coronavirus restrictions were still in place, mask wearers were in the minority when the World Cup ski circus visited Adelboden this year for the men's slalom races.

Photo: Keystone, 9 January 2022





## “Fortress Europe” under scrutiny

Parliament has made the contentious decision to increase Switzerland’s monetary contribution to Frontex, the European Union agency that secures the EU’s external borders. The electorate will give its verdict on 15 May. A no vote could lead to further tension with Brussels.

THEODORA PETER

“When I think of Frontex, I mainly think of violence,” says Malek Ossi. The 28-year-old Syrian, who fled to Switzerland via Turkey six years ago, is a member of the Migrant Solidarity Network, which has forced a referendum opposing an increase in Switzerland’s contribution to the budget of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. Ossi spoke to the online magazine “Republik” about the odyssey that brought him to Switzerland via the Balkan route. “I know what it means when the Turkish military are behind you and the Greek police are waiting for you up ahead.”

He hid in the forest for a week with dozens of other refugees before attempting to cross the Evros river border, which was being guarded by the

Greek and Frontex police at the time. Ossi eventually managed to get into Europe, but many others failed to reach the EU border. Refugees repeatedly complain of being driven back by border guards. For example, there are documented cases of Greek coastguards in the Aegean pushing migrants in dinghies back into Turkish waters.

These so-called pushbacks violate the European Convention on Human Rights and the Geneva Refugee Convention, which states that refugees must be allowed to file an asylum application and have the right to due process. In other words, anyone seeking asylum should at least be able to do just that. Asylum and human rights organisations accuse Frontex of tolerating or even being involved in illegal

pushbacks by police forces. A European Parliament committee has now called for greater monitoring and transparency.

### Schengen obligation

Last autumn, the federal parliament also addressed Frontex’s role along the EU’s external borders. As a member of Schengen, Switzerland has been making financial contributions to Frontex since 2011. As such, it has a responsibility to help fund the EU border agency’s budget increase.

The expansion of Frontex will involve building up a standing corps of 10,000 operational staff by 2027. Switzerland has been paying 14 million Swiss francs a year until now. Parlia-

Frontex, shown here patrolling the Greek-Turkish border, wants to build up a standing corps of 10,000 operational staff. Photo: Keystone



ment has decided to increase this annual contribution to 61 million francs by 2027. The SP and the Greens were against the idea, arguing that Frontex wanted to establish a “bona fide army” to seal off “Fortress Europe”. However, the National Council and the Council of States both backed a stronger commitment to protecting the external borders of the Schengen Area – the consensus was that it benefits Switzerland.

That the Mediterranean had become a mass grave was a “European scandal”, said the Green Liberal National Councillor Beat Flach. But this was not the fault of Frontex, he added. They were the solution, not the problem. Responding to sceptics, Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer suggested that Switzerland would be better placed to help safeguard fundamental rights if it “played a role on the frontline”. His EU-sceptic SVP is split, however. Some party members welcome tighter controls on the

external Schengen borders as a bulwark against “economic migrants”. Others would prefer the extra millions to be invested in protecting Switzerland’s borders.

### Against the “militarisation of borders”

This issue will now be decided by popular vote, after an alliance of some 30 organisations forced a referendum. The activists comprising the Migrant Solidarity Network are fundamentally opposed to the EU border regime, saying it “symbolises the militarisation of borders”.

Amnesty International does not belong to the alliance. Instead, the human rights organisation favours strengthening the very powers within the EU that would oblige Frontex to “focus on protecting refugees instead of threatening them further”. Resistance to migrants on the EU border mainly comes from the Eastern Euro-

pean member states. The vote on 15 May will not decide whether Switzerland contributes to EU border protection per se, but it could have implications in terms of Switzerland’s place in the Schengen Area, says Fabio Wasserfallen, who is a political scientist at the University of Berne. “You are either in or out when it comes to Schengen – with all the consequences that go with it.” Switzerland need not fear immediate expulsion if the electorate votes no, “but pressure to find a quick solution would be considerable”.

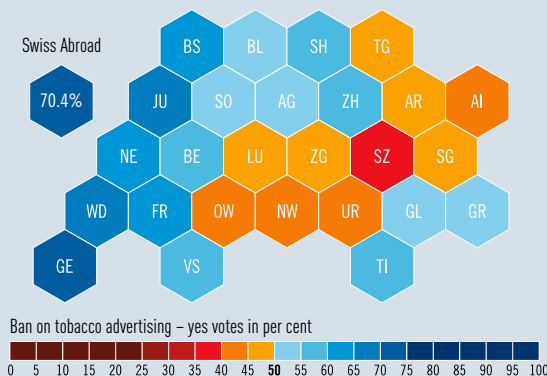
And it would cause irritation in Brussels, where Switzerland would no longer be regarded as a “reliable partner”, Wasserfallen explains. This could further complicate relations with the EU, which are already strained.



## Review of the 13 February votes

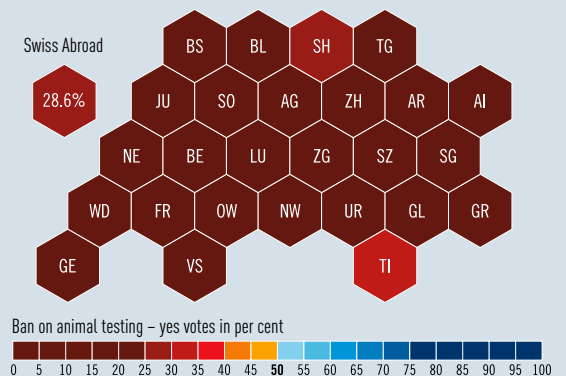
### Yes to restricting tobacco advertising:

Children and young people are to be protected from all forms of tobacco advertising, after 57 per cent of voters and the majority of cantons approved an initiative submitted by health organisations.



### No to a ban on animal testing:

An emphatic 79 per cent of the electorate rejected a popular initiative submitted by a citizens’ group calling for a radical change in current pharmaceutical testing practices. Not one single canton voted yes.



## Fresh attempt to secure bilateral agreements

Since the abandonment of talks on a framework agreement in May 2021 (see edition 4/2021 of “Swiss Review”), the Swiss government has been looking for new ways to cooperate with the EU. The Federal Council has been preparing the outlines of a possible proposal.

At the time of our editorial deadline in mid-February, details of the new agenda were still unclear. What we do know is that Berne wants to continue pursuing bilateral deals with the EU, despite Brussels having ruled out this option until now. The focus is on sectoral agreements that would also involve the incorporation of EU law.

Berne wishes to secure exemptions on tricky domestic issues, such as wage protection and welfare benefits for EU citizens in Switzerland.

“We must stop viewing this purely as a technical and institutional issue,” said the foreign minister and president of the Swiss Confederation, Ignazio Cassis (FDP), in media interviews. “If policymakers and the public begin to realise what type of material benefits Switzerland can expect, then they will accept institutional rapprochement.”

A broader approach to the negotiations was necessary, “in which both sides are willing to compromise”. However, it may still be some time before Berne and Brussels are reading from the same page. The disadvantages of being left out in the cold are already being felt, with the Swiss scientific community having lost direct access to key higher education and research projects funded by the EU. (TP)

## Overview of all the votes on 15 May

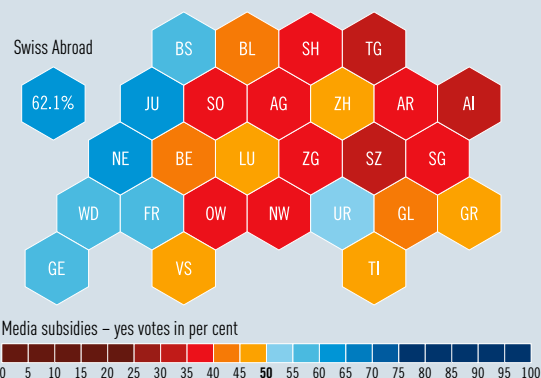
**Frontex:** As a member of the Schengen Area, Switzerland should contribute financially to the expansion of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Frontex, says parliament. Left-wing activists have forced a referendum to contest this decision (see page 17).

**Organ donations:** Controversially, the Federal Council and parliament want to amend the Transplantation Act. In future, it would mean that anyone who does not wish to donate their own organs when they die must make this explicitly known during their lifetime (see pages 20 and 21).

**Film Act:** Under the revised Film Act, streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon and Disney+ will in future be obliged to invest four per cent of their annual Swiss revenue in Swiss film productions. The youth wings of the FDP, SVP and GLP have launched a referendum against the revised Film Act, which they fear will prompt streaming services to raise their subscription prices. (TP)

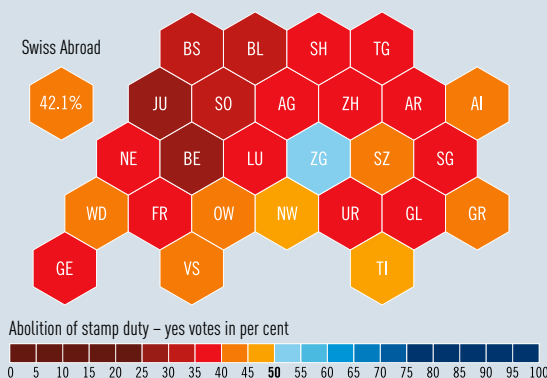
### No to media subsidies:

Newspapers, online platforms, and news agencies will not be receiving additional public sector funding, after 55 per cent of voters rejected a package of measures to help the media.



### No to abolishing stamp duty:

Companies will continue to have to pay stamp duty on equity capital, after 63 per cent of the electorate rejected a proposal that would have led to annual tax losses worth 250 million Swiss francs. (TP)



## New proposal on organ donations – a good or a bad idea?

Donor organs such as hearts, lungs and kidneys are in short supply in Switzerland. That's why the Federal Council and parliament want to change the national organ donation system, moving from explicit to presumed consent. A referendum has been called on the issue, with voters due to give their verdict in May.

SUSANNE WENGER

At the end of last year, 1,434 anxious, hopeful people were on the official Swisstransplant waiting list for a new organ. In 2021, the phone call came too late for 72 people, who died while still waiting for a suitable organ. Organs from 166 people who died were transplanted in the same year. Although this was more than in the previous year, Switzerland's organ donation rate is low compared to other countries. This does not appear to be down to any marked reluctance to donate organs. On the contrary, surveys show that the majority of the population are favourable to the idea. Nevertheless, only a relatively small number of people explicitly give their consent on an organ donor card. The Federal Council and parliament want to maximise the potential for organ donation by altering the principle of consent.

Since 2007, organ donation after death has been governed by an explicit opt-in model. It means that only people who have given their consent while still alive are permitted to be donors. The government is seeking to reverse this policy, whereby anyone who does not wish to donate their own organs must make this known during their life-

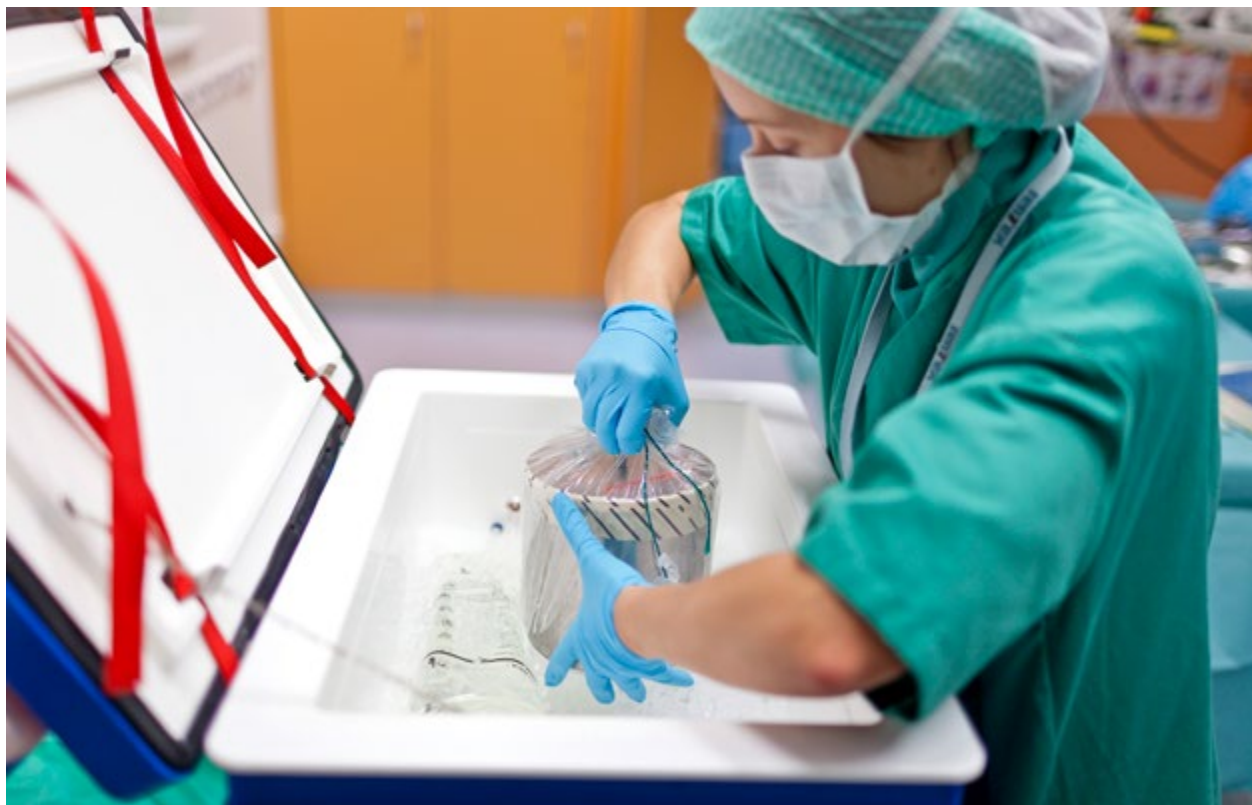
time. This is referred to as the presumed consent or opt-out model, which applies in several European countries including France, Italy, Austria and Spain. The organ donation rate in these countries is notably higher than in Switzerland. New research shows that this is attributable in part to the system of presumed consent, said the Federal Council in its dispatch to parliament.

### Broader application

The government decided to intervene after a campaign group in French-speaking Switzerland submitted a popular initiative called "Donate organs – save lives" in 2019, calling for a switch in favour of the opt-out system as well as strict implementation of the regime. For the Federal Council, this initiative overstepped the mark. In response, the government submitted to parliament an indirect counterproposal to amend the Transplantation Act, allowing for a broader application of the principle of presumed consent. Loved ones of the deceased must also be consulted, says the Federal Council. They should retain their current right to

A cooler box containing a donor heart arrives in the operating theatre at a Zurich hospital.

Photo: Keystone



express their opinion, provided nothing attests in writing to the deceased having explicitly ruled out organ donation. If no loved ones can be contacted, the removal of organs will not be permissible unless there are clear instructions to the contrary.

Furthermore, proactive measures will ensure that all sections of the population are informed of their presumed consent. A clear majority in parliament voted in favour of this wider interpretation of the opt-out model. The authors of the original initiative withdrew their proposal on condition that the indirect counterproposal comes into effect. However, the counterproposal now has to survive the ballot box, after a referendum was submitted in January 2022 by campaigners who say that Switzerland needs to debate the matter.

### Not without “informed consent”

The referendum was forced not by political parties or associations, but by private individuals and experts from the fields of healthcare, law and ethics. Susanne Clauss, co-chair of the referendum committee, is one of them. Clauss, who comes from Berne, wants the current system – voluntary, informed consent, as she puts it – to remain the same. Without informed consent, which is a key principle in medicine, organs should not be removed, says Clauss, a nurse and midwife who runs a home birthing service. “If there is no clear evidence that the deceased wanted to donate their organs, organ removal is unethical and questionable on constitutional grounds.”



“This will put loved ones under more pressure.”

SUSANNE CLAUSS  
CO-CHAIR OF THE REFERENDUM COMMITTEE

Most opponents of the counterproposal will agree that a sufficient supply of donor organs is in the public interest. But they doubt whether the principle of presumed consent will solve the problem. And the system would involve the government encroaching on personal freedom, which also extends to the bodies of the deceased, they argue. If staying silent is deemed to be the same as giving consent, this could erode the right to bodily autonomy.

### “Physical integrity preserved”

Clauss disagrees with the assertion made in the parliamentary debate that a broader application of the principle of

presumed consent is good news for loved ones. In her job, she has often seen how stressful the decision on donating organs can be for them. This will now put them under even more pressure. “Society will expect them to give consent on behalf of the deceased,” she says. Organ donation at the end of life is a personal matter on which debate is split not only along party-political lines, but also shaped by personal values and experience. Clauss, a local SP politician in the city of Biel, opposes the idea of presumed consent, whereas



“Enough safeguards have been put in place.”

FRANZ GRÜTER, LUCERNE NATIONAL COUNCILLOR  
FROM THE RIGHT-WING SVP

most of her Social Democratic parliamentary colleagues at national level voted in favour of it.

Conversely, Lucerne National Councillor Franz Grüter from the right-wing SVP supports the law change, but his parliamentary party does not. “Enough safeguards have been put in place to ensure that the physical integrity of organ donors is preserved,” he says, adding that people, while alive, should be trusted to be able to say no if they want. And if they don’t specifically say no, their loved ones can still say no if they think the deceased would have objected to organ donation.

### Concern for his daughter

This issue is close to home for Grüter, an IT entrepreneur. His 26-year-old daughter suffers from a heart condition and has already had six operations. “She is doing well at the moment but will probably need a donor heart eventually,” he says. Four out of five donor hearts needed in Switzerland come from abroad, as he is aware. The country’s low donation rate gives Grüter pause for thought. As a father and politician, he has put himself on the organ donor register and wants to get involved in the referendum campaign.

In addition to presumed and explicit consent, a theoretical third option is also possible: mandatory choice. The model would regularly require people – when visiting their GP or renewing their identity card, for example – to state whether they are willing to donate organs. The Swiss National Advisory Commission on Biomedical Ethics recommends this approach. Germany recently introduced it to complement its opt-in model. However, Swiss parliamentarians have rejected related motions, saying its implementation would be too laborious.

## Zurich's new art building revives uncomfortable memories

Architect David Chipperfield's elegant Kunsthaus extension was hailed as a coup for Zurich. Yet the new building has become mired in accusations over the "plundered art" of contentious arms dealer Emil G. Bührle.

JÜRIG STEINER

Zurich's Mayor Corine Mauch was full of superlatives as she stood in the entrance hall of the David Chipperfield Kunsthaus extension at the inauguration ceremony in autumn 2021 – superlatives that betrayed her city's ambition in commissioning the British architect to transform what was hitherto a rather modest venue. In short, Zurich wanted the sophistication and global attention that a world-class art museum can attract.

Chipperfield's building, which cost 206 million Swiss francs, certainly has the necessary cachet. Berne boasts the Zentrum Paul Klee, Basel the Fondation Beyeler – both museums designed by Renzo Piano. But now Zurich has surpassed both, with Chipperfield turning the Kunsthaus into one of Europe's biggest museums.

### Imposing structure, bright interior

The Kunsthaus is located in Zurich's densely built university quarter near the city centre, just up from the lake. This is where Chipperfield has added his imposing design made of Jurassic limestone. Although its facade is softened with slim vertical fins, the imposing new block has attracted criticism in Zurich, with some locals calling it an oversized, elitist extravagance. At the same time, few disagree that the building's bright interior provides a worthy setting for fine art.

But in wanting to show off its artistic credentials, Zurich has also stirred some uncomfortable memories of the past. This is because the Kunsthaus extension has been designed in part to exhibit the illustrious collection of erst-



while Zurich industrialist Emil G. Bührle (1890–1956) – a permanent loan of 170 works of art, including paintings by van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne and Renoir. Such an impressive roster of impressionists would normally be expected to grace Paris. Yet the association with Bührle, a contentious figure who manufactured arms, is awkward.

### Art lover and arms exporter

The incredible story of Emil G. Bührle has long been critically reviewed and documented. Bührle was posted from Germany to Zurich in 1924, so that he could further the development of an anti-aircraft gun on neutral soil at armaments manufacturer Werkzeugmaschinenfabrik Oerlikon. Such an assignment would have been impossible in Germany, because the Treaty of Versailles had banned Germany from rebuilding its domestic arms industry. In no time at all, Bührle turned Werkzeugmaschinenfabrik Oerlikon into Switzerland's biggest arms manufacturer – and became the country's richest person.

Bührle, who gained Swiss citizenship in 1937, had excellent connections extending to the upper echelons of Nazi



Emil G. Bührle (1890–1956): art lover and arms manufacturer.



Germany. After 1945, he was of course flexible enough to adapt his business model to the new realities of the Cold War. He subsequently exported arms to all crisis regions around the world – not always legally, as it turned out.

He invested the wealth he made from the arms trade in various things – including art; Bührle had studied art as a young man. After the war, he bought countless works that Jewish gallerists and collectors had originally sold under duress – hence accusations that his amassed collection is essentially plundered art. Bührle was then able to develop close ties with the art-friendly Zurich elite by personally covering all the costs for the first extension of the Kunsthhaus.

## Off limits

Following Bührle's sudden death in 1956, this art collection, currently overseen by the eponymous Bührle Foundation, remained virtually off limits for decades at a private villa on the outskirts of Zurich. The address was the victim of an art heist in 2008, when thieves took advantage of lax security. It was only then that Bührle's uninsurable collection –

**The Chipperfield-designed Kunsthhaus extension is an imposing building with an elegant, rib-like facade.**

Photo: Keystone

worth many millions of francs – gained a wider public. In 2012, the Zurich electorate voted to approve 75 million francs in public funding for the recently completed Kunsthhaus extension. The shadowy origins surrounding the Bührle collection set to be exhibited in the new building was common knowledge but barely mentioned at the time.

## A “contaminated” museum?

In March 2022, it will have been exactly 20 years since the Bergier Commission presented its concluding report on the assets that Switzerland acquired during the Second World War. This historical study significantly increased awareness among the Swiss public of the country's role as an accomplice in Nazi crimes. This begs the question why controversy in Zurich surrounding the origins of the Bührle collection has only erupted now that the paintings are already hanging in the new building.

Historian Erich Keller proffers an interesting theory in his book “Das kontaminierte Museum” (The Contaminated Museum), revealing the close links between the Bührle collection, the left-of-centre Zurich city council and the



Corine Mauch:  
“The controversy surrounding Bührle is good for us.”



Paul Cézanne's "Boy in the Red Waistcoat" is one of the most prestigious works in the Bührle collection. It was stolen in 2008 before being recovered in Belgrade. It now hangs in the Zurich Kunsthaus. Photo: Keystone

Zurich Kunsthaus. He suggests the powers that be have been more interested in promoting Zurich as a centre of art than taking a serious look at the Bührle collection. According to Keller, they want to dissociate the collection from its founder – so that the art no longer stands for a man and his arms deals, but for Zurich, a city of culture.

This is why the existing provenance research into Bührle's art collection is inadequate, he says. Can Zurich really say for sure that there is no plundered art among the paintings, given that such research has remained in the hands of the Bührle Foundation? Former members of the Bergier Commission are now among those calling for an independent review.

The situation in Zurich contrasts sharply with what happened when the Berne Museum of Fine Arts was named heir to the trove of art dealer Cornelius Gurlitt, who died in 2014 – Gurlitt had inherited the collection from his father Hildebrand, who was a Nazi art dealer. After conducting an independent provenance assessment, Berne relinquished part of the collection – probably easier to do as Gurlitt was a relative outsider. Bührle, on the other hand, had intimate connections with the Zurich elite.

However, things now appear to be moving in Zurich. Mayor Corine Mauch announced that the city has called on the Bührle Foundation to ensure that the presentation of its works in the Kunsthaus extension is accompanied by the necessary context. "The controversy surrounding Bührle is good for us, even if it hurts," she told the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung".

The Bührle collection (in German): [revue.link/buehrle](https://www.revue.ch/buehrle)

The Bührle collection (in English): [revue.link/artcollector](https://www.revue.ch/artcollector)

Erich Keller, «Das kontaminierte Museum»: [revue.link/keller](https://www.revue.ch/keller)

## Couples marrying, mountains swaying

# 19.2

Switzerland began 2022 with record temperatures, as Poschiavo in the Alps recorded a high of 19.2°C. It is hard to know whether to laugh or cry about such distinctly unseasonal weather. In January as a whole, 13 out of 14 Swiss weather stations recorded above-average temperatures.

# 22.2.22

Swiss couples prefer to marry in summer than in winter. This February was an exception – but not because of the mild weather. It had more to do with a unique date. On 22/2/22, almost all wedding venues in Switzerland were booked out. The couples who tied the knot on this quirky date presumably also did so for the right reasons.

# 6.2

Books are dead, they say. But the statistics say otherwise. In 2021, book sales in German-speaking Switzerland rose for the third year in succession – this time by five per cent. Fiction was up 6.2 per cent. And six of the top ten bestselling novels in German-speaking Switzerland were written by the following Swiss authors: Donna Leon, Benedict Wells, Christine Brand, Joël Dicker, Arno Camenisch and Silvia Götschi.

# 9,000,000,000

Nine billion cigarettes are consumed in Switzerland every year. The nicotine haze is quite thick at the moment, with sales of cigarettes and other tobacco products having risen since the beginning of the pandemic – the first time they have done so in ten years, climbing four per cent. People working from home is one of the reasons, say experts.

# 2

The numbers on this page often indicate change. But surely not in the case of the mighty, immutable Matterhorn. Wrong! Scientists say that the summit of Switzerland's iconic mountain is in constant motion, swaying a few micrometres back and forth once every two seconds – stimulated by seismic energy in the earth. The swaying is over ten times stronger at the summit than at the base of the mountain, rather akin to how the top of a tree sways more in the wind.



# “I was also able to improve my language skills”

The young Swiss Abroad Pol Giralt from Spain was a student at the Swiss school in Barcelona, like his grandmother and father. During the last long summer holidays, he visited Switzerland and worked on a farm.

INTERVIEW: RUTH VON GUNTEN, EDUCATIONSUISSE

Agriviva was founded over 75 years ago. The organisation aims to build a bridge between town and country and different cultures by arranging placements of several weeks for young people from all over the world. In return for free board and lodging and a small amount of pocket money, you will help a farming family with their daily work. Ideal for all those who like to be active, like nature, and want to get to know a new family and life on a Swiss farm.

## Pol Giralt, how did you find out about the Swiss organisation Agriviva?

My father read an article in the “Swiss Review” by educationsuisse on the subject of “Gaining work experience in Switzerland”. Agriviva was also mentioned in it. I thought working on a farm was a good idea and I really wanted to try it out. I found all the necessary information on the Agriviva website and so I signed up.

## How did you like it on the farm in Switzerland?

I spent a whole month on the farm in the village of Bözberg in the canton of Aargau and experienced a lot. I liked it very much, although it was sometimes exhausting work.

## Describe for us your typical day on the farm.

I got up at 7 am and had a big breakfast with the family. At 8 o'clock we went to the field to pick cherries. Every day there were about 15 people working, but sometimes there were 30 people. The cherry trees are about four metres high. So, we climbed ladders or picked from the ground more than 500 kilos of fruit every day. After the lunch



Pol Giralt: “To experience hard work yourself teaches us to have respect for the farmers.”  
Photo donated

break, I either helped pick cherries again or was in the barn milking cows.

## Were there any language problems or other problems of understanding?

I learned German at the Swiss school in Barcelona and at home with my grandmother. So, there were few misunderstandings. The farmer’s family knew that I didn’t understand Swiss German. There were also some employees from Germany, so we always spoke German. And I was also able to improve my language skills.

## What did you like most on the farm?

It was very interesting to meet many new people and the different cultures. It was also interesting to see how the farmers market the fruit and to follow the path of the cherries from the field to the supermarket.

## Will you return to Switzerland to work on a farm again?

I would like to go to a farmer’s family again next year. However, in September I started my studies in chemical engineering at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya - UPC. I am not sure whether I will have enough time for Agriviva.

## Would you recommend a stay with a farm family to your friends?

Yes, for sure! And not only to my friends, but to all young people, I recommend helping on a farm. It’s not only a great experience, but you also learn new things. To experience yourself the hard work that is done so that we have food on the table every day teaches us to have respect for the farmers.

Educationsuisse offers young Swiss Abroad advice on all matters related to education in Switzerland.



educationsuisse, Education in Switzerland,  
Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland  
Tel. +41 31 356 61 04; info@educationsuisse.ch;  
www.educationsuisse.ch

## Taking out health insurance on my return to Switzerland

*The question: I thought I would automatically have health insurance when I return to Switzerland, because health insurance is mandatory after all. No one told me I would have to take out health insurance myself. When can I actually do this?*

**The answer:** No, you do not automatically have health insurance. But as soon as you become a Swiss resident again, you can and must take out basic insurance. This cover will normally apply retroactively from the date you register with your local municipality (i.e. as soon as you legally reside in Switzerland).

Health insurance is mandatory for everyone living in Switzerland. Health insurers are therefore also obliged to provide basic insurance to anyone who resides in Switzerland, regardless of age or state of health. Furthermore, you are free to choose your health insurer (from the list of authorised insurers). The law governs which services are covered by basic insurance.

Health insurers cannot refuse basic insurance to Swiss who have returned to Switzerland after living abroad, nor are they permitted to impose any restrictions (e.g. due to pre-existing medical conditions). You must take out health insurance within three months of taking up residence in Switzerland. Cover will then apply retroactively from the date you started legally residing in the country.

Certain people are exempt from the obligation to take out insurance in Switzerland. These include retired persons who draw a pension from an EU country but do not receive a Swiss pension, as well as anyone who is in Switzerland for education or training purposes and has insurance equivalent to basic Swiss cover.

Health insurance is taken out individually for each family member (adults and children). All insured persons pay a premium which can vary depending on the health insurance scheme, but the basic insurance services are the same for everyone. It is worth comparing premiums. The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) provides a comparison of premiums online: [www.priminfo.ch](http://www.priminfo.ch).

OSA LEGAL DEPARTMENT



Photo: Thomas Schneider

## The 2nd Congress of Young Swiss Abroad will be devoted to green issues

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad is organising the 2nd Congress of Young Swiss Abroad this summer in collaboration with the Youth Parliament of Swiss Abroad (YPSA).

The very first Congress of Young Swiss Abroad was held in July 2021 – and it was a success. Never before has there been a dedicated event of this type providing young Swiss Abroad with a broad-based opportunity for interaction. The congress, which took place online, was organised in collaboration with the Youth Parliament of Swiss Abroad (YPSA), which acts as the voice of all young Swiss living abroad. Topics of interest such as Swiss politics, education, jobs and culture featured on a varied agenda. Thanks to the virtual format, around 50 young people from 23 different countries ranging from France to Sri Lanka, Chile and Australia were able to contribute.

As this online get-together was such an encouraging experience, a second congress is now being planned for 13 July 2022. “Green Switzerland” will be its key theme and focus. From 16 May 2022, you can enrol for the event on our website at [www.swisscommunity.org](http://www.swisscommunity.org) > Youth Offers. Further information as well as a detailed schedule will shortly also be available on the website. (MB)

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad,  
Youth Service, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland  
tel.: +41 31 356 61 24  
email: [youth@swisscommunity.org](mailto:youth@swisscommunity.org)  
[www.swisscommunity.org](http://www.swisscommunity.org)

## The life verification process is now automated for the majority of OASI/DI pension beneficiaries

The Swiss Compensation Office is using automated data sharing to improve the process of checking whether pensioners are still alive. This will simplify the procedure for the majority of Swiss nationals who draw pension benefits under the old-age and survivors' insurance (OASI) and/or disability insurance (DI) schemes.

Until now, all insured persons receiving OASI/DI benefits have had to submit a life certificate to the Swiss Compensation Office (SCO) at regular intervals to ensure uninterrupted payment of their pension. As of this year, this process, which is costly both for the SCO and for insured persons, will be simplified through the introduction of automated data sharing between the various administrative bodies including the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA).

Specifically, this means that Swiss nationals living abroad who are duly registered with the Swiss representation of their country of domicile will no longer be required to provide a life certificate, as this information will instead be transmitted directly from the Register of the Swiss Abroad to the SCO.

Swiss nationals who are not registered with diplomatic or consular representations will still be asked to submit life certificates. They must complete the document as usual and have it endorsed to prevent their pension from being stopped.

Please note that the new procedure applies from 2022. Anyone who has not yet submitted their life certificate for 2021 is still required to do so.

However, the new simplified procedure does not affect the obligation to inform the SCO directly of any changes in personal status such as a change of address or marital status, etc.

At the beginning of 2022, the SCO also launched an information campaign which will be phased throughout the year. Every insured person will be personally informed about this change at the time they were due to have received the relevant life certificate form. (CCO)

Notifying the SCO of changes in circumstances: <http://revue.link/zascontact>

### Don't miss the statutory period

Approval of the "Marriage for all" proposal (see edition 1/2022 of "Swiss Review") has retroactive implications with regard to the matrimonial regime for same-sex couples who marry abroad before 1 July 2022 but have no prenuptial agreement. Under Swiss law, joint ownership of property applies retroactively to same-sex couples (instead of separation of property). For this reason, either same-sex spouse can inform the other spouse in writing by 30 June 2022 that their existing matrimonial regime will continue to apply. This declaration must be personally signed. (BJ)

## Federal votes

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

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

The Federal Council decided that there will be three federal proposals submitted to the people on 15 May 2022:

- Amendment of 1 October 2021 to the Federal Act on Film Production and Film Culture (Film Act, FiA)
- Amendment of 1 October 2021 to the Federal Act on the Transplantation of Organs, Tissues and Cells (Transplantation Act)
- Federal Decree of 1 October 2021 on the Approval and Implementation of the Exchange of Notes between Switzerland and the EU on the Adoption of the Regulation (EU) 2019/1896 on the European Border and Coast Guard and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1052/2013 and (EU) 2016/1624 (Development of the Schengen Acquis).

## Popular initiatives

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

- Federal Popular Initiative 'For a day of reflection before every abortion (Sleep on it Initiative)' (21.06.2023)
- Federal Popular Initiative 'For the protection of babies that are viable outside the womb (Save viable babies Initiative)' (21.06.2023)
- Federal Popular Initiative 'Let the people and the cantons decide on emergency federal legislation!' (21.06.2023)

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

Responsible for the FDFA official communications:  
 Consular Directorate  
 Innovation and Partnerships  
 Effingerstrasse 27, 3003 Berne, Switzerland  
[www.eda.admin.ch](http://www.eda.admin.ch), email: [kdip@deda.admin.ch](mailto:kdip@deda.admin.ch)

## The FDFA is there for you – but not all the time!

Are you travelling or living abroad? Or spending your retirement in the sun? Or maybe visiting remote areas on your round-the-world trip? The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs is there to support you in times of trouble – provided you have done everything that can reasonably be expected of you to avoid problems.

Amongst the tasks assigned to the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), one of the main responsibilities is the provision of support to Swiss citizens travelling or living abroad. With almost 800,000 Swiss Abroad and millions of trips made outside our borders every year, the Swiss consular representations are called upon to assist our fellow citizens on a daily basis. This role is partly administrative, similar to that of a municipal administration, but it also concerns support relating to difficulties or situations which require special protection.

But be aware that this support is not absolute and there is no entitlement to it. We would like to remind you of the principles of individual responsibility and subsidiarity within the consular domain.

The principle rooted in the Federal Constitution that “all individuals shall take responsibility for themselves” finds its corollary in the provisions governing consular work: “every individual shall exercise personal responsibility when planning or undertaking a stay abroad or when working abroad”. This means that careless or reckless behaviour and the absence of appropriate preparation will result in the limitation of access to the services or protection available. According to the principle of subsidiarity, which also governs questions of consular protection, action from the FDFA can only be envisaged in cases where a person cannot find any means to help themselves. However, there is no enti-

tlement to FDFA assistance.

It is therefore the responsibility of each Swiss citizen abroad to do everything necessary to avoid finding themselves in a difficult situation and, should they find themselves in difficulty, to look for solutions themselves. At the same time, the FDFA does provide a number of tools to Swiss citizens.

For (future) Swiss Abroad, the first thing to do is register with the relevant representation. This registration is a prerequisite for inclusion in the register of the Swiss Abroad and access to consular services. Whether following arrival or during the preparation stages, it is advisable to consult the large amount of infor-

mation and advice published on the FDFA website. This information, which can be accessed directly from the FDFA homepage (under the heading Living and working abroad > Preparations for a stay abroad, emigration and repatriation), concerns the different steps of emigration or a return to Switzerland and provides a great deal of helpful advice.

For travellers, it is necessary to consult the information for travellers and to register their trip on the Travel Admin system, via the mobile or web application, and to respect the recommendations made there. The Travel Admin application also contains a lot of useful information for preparing a trip, in the form of checklists, comple-

**It is up to you to do what is necessary to avoid trouble. In the end, everyone is responsible for themselves.**

Photo: Chunip Wong, iStock



mented by the FDFA website (heading **Travel advice & representations**). Where necessary, and if the principles of individual responsibility and subsidiarity have been properly respected, support can be provided by the FDFA, individually or collectively, as demonstrated through the major repatriation action in spring 2020 in the context of the Covid-19 crisis.

<sup>1)</sup> Art. 6 – Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation

<sup>2)</sup> Art. 5 – Federal Act on Swiss Persons and Institutions Abroad



## The FDFA is there to help

As the central contact point for all consular matters, the FDFA is on hand to advise and assist you every day around the clock via the FDFA Helpline, providing you with various consular services via a worldwide representation network that nurtures relations with the Swiss expatriate community and encourages mutual interaction. The FDFA publishes important information such as travel advice via the usual communication channels and the Travel Admin app. And should you ever find yourself in difficulty, the FDFA can offer consular protection.



## The principle of individual responsibility

Be aware: the Swiss Abroad Act (SAA) is based on the key principle of individual responsibility, which is also enshrined in the Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation. Therefore, responsibility for planning and spending a period abroad or pursuing an activity abroad lies with the individual concerned. This does not mean the federal government will abandon any of its citizens who get into difficulty abroad. However, its support is subsidiary and therefore will only apply if an individual has previously exhausted all means of helping themselves.



## Overcoming challenges independently

According to the SAA, the federal government may assist natural persons and legal entities abroad if such parties are unable or cannot be reasonably expected to safeguard their interests independently or with the help of third parties. The federal government's expectation therefore is that each and every individual will assume personal responsibility when planning and spending a period abroad or pursuing an activity abroad, be well informed, act in a risk-appropriate, lawful manner, and try to overcome any difficulties independently or with the help of third parties.



## Welfare assistance and consular protection

In certain cases, the federal government can prevent Swiss Abroad from falling into situations of need and provide them with welfare assistance. It can also provide Swiss nationals abroad with consular protection. However, welfare assistance and consular protection are only provided on a subsidiary basis, i.e. the federal government will only help parties who are unable to support themselves independently or with help from private or public sources, or who are unable or cannot be reasonably expected to safeguard their interests independently or with the help of third parties.



## When the federal government cannot help

According to the SAA, there is no legal entitlement to consular protection, even when citizens assume individual responsibility and the principle of subsidiarity is maintained. The federal government may therefore refuse or limit assistance, in particular if it would put others in danger, the persons concerned have acted negligently or abused assistance in the past, or there is a risk that it could be detrimental to the federal government's foreign policy interests. However, this does not apply in cases where there is a threat to the life or health of the persons concerned.



## Consular services have their price

Persons who have used consular services must reimburse the costs as well as any fees to the federal government. Individuals are also liable for cost reimbursement if the federal government performs a service without being requested to do so by the persons concerned, but in accordance with their presumed wishes and interests. Fees or cost reimbursement may be waived in part or in full in case of need or for other good reason. However, the federal government must take account of whether the persons concerned have acted negligently.



## Life without electricity



SIMONE WEINMANN:  
"Die Erinnerung an unbekannte Städte."  
Kunstmann Verlag 2021,  
272 pages, CHF 35

The sky suddenly turned dark in 2030. Out went the lights. Infrastructure crumbled. And the world reverted to a state of pre-industrial gloom. That was 15 years ago. Since then, humans have reconciled themselves to a frugal existence.

In her dystopian vision of the future "Die Erinnerung an unbekannte Städte" (Remembering unknown cities), author Simone Weinmann paints the oppressive picture of a new dark age after climate meltdown and the collapse of technology. People had been unprepared for the disaster that struck. Everything they were used to disappeared in a flash. At the village school, teacher and former programmer Ludwig continues to coach now-obsolete subjects like maths and grammar, as if there was a future for such things. In doing so, he attracts the ire of sectarian worshippers who have put their faith in God. Young Nathanael wants nothing to do with their religion and would like to become a doctor. He therefore decides to leave his strict parents. Vanessa accompanies him, because she is fleeing from a broken family. Both dream of the legendary tunnel that is supposed to lead to warmer climes on the other side of the mountains. Their respective parents assign Ludwig as the person to bring them back home.

There are many dystopian novels, with George Orwell and Aldous Huxley having set the benchmark. Simone Weinmann very much belongs to this genre, yet she finds her own voice. Power, control and the struggle against both are a feature of stories like Orwell's "1984". Weinmann, on the other hand, patiently and lucidly unravels a world in which people have to organise themselves through primitive means and without government protection. In an atmospherically coherent narrative containing subtle details, she describes how life without electricity could be – and cogently illustrates why a small handful of people like Nathanael, Vanessa and Ludwig choose to leave this world behind. Instead of fighting back (whom would they fight anyway?), the protagonists simply try to find happiness of their own accord. Weinmann's image of the future is neither totalitarian nor violent, but anarchic and miserable. Scrap and debris on the side of the road afford us a glimpse of the old world. "What do we lose when culture and civilisation break down?" asks the author. The three runaways give us an answer. We lose everything, except perhaps the last glimmer of hope. Weinmann wisely chooses not to tell us whether this hope is fulfilled.

Simone Weinmann is an astrophysicist who lives in Zurich. This is her debut novel.

BEAT MAZENAUER

## A soulful production



ZIAN:  
"Burden",  
Sony, 2022

It was one of last year's biggest Swiss hits, taking the charts by storm virtually overnight. The song was "Show You", the singer Zian. No one had heard of him before. Who is he?

Zian is 28 years old, lives in Basel and goes by the real name of Tizian Hugenschmidt. He used to tap the drums at the Basel carnival as a child, before graduating to a proper drum kit. Growing up, he also played the guitar and piano. Otherwise, his musical education was low key. Much like other lads his age, he listened to rock, metal and Swiss-German rap. His love of a good pop song only came later.

But once things started moving, they moved very quickly. Under a professional management team as well as label giant Sony, Zian released his first song "Show You" in collaboration with in-demand producer Henrik Amschler. It was an impressive ballad, carried by piano and bags of pathos, in which Zian's exceptionally soulful voice stood out. There was no shortage of admirers: "Show You" stayed in the Swiss charts for five months, handing the Basel singer his breakthrough.

Debut album "Burden" is the next chapter – and the singer has pulled it off again. Another Henrik Amschler production, this LP has an expansive, living, breathing sound imbued with synthesizers, piano and drum machines. Besides this sophisticated feel, Zian's vocals also live up to last year's billing. The emotion is authentic, lending gravitas to what is a reflective and at times sorrowful, serious tone. "Burden" touches on sombre themes such as fear, sacrifice, loss, and a young man's existential angst, delivering these with pomp and poignancy at every turn.

Produced to within an inch of its life, this album blatantly targets a young, mainstream demographic. Be that as it may, Zian is certainly not a one-hit wonder.

MARKO LEHTINEN

# Pierin Vincenz



Is the wellbeing of Switzerland related to the health of its banks? If so, there is cause for concern, as the biggest Swiss banks seem to be suffering from a mysterious malaise. This syndrome is leading to the downfall of their leaders. In 2020, Tidjane Thiam, chief executive officer of Credit Suisse, was forced to resign in the context of tailing ordered by his own company. January saw the exit of António Horta-Osório, chairman of the same bank. The banker was fired for breaches of health rules. Surely not in Switzerland! Next up was the golden boy from the canton of Grisons, Pierin Vincenz, credited for having brought the small, local bank Raiffeisen up to the ranks of “too big to fail”.

Everyone seemed keen on Pierin. The press reported with amusement on his all-expenses-paid trips to strip clubs. The man apparently trashed a hotel room during a wild night with a call girl. The world of banking always seemed so grey; in fact it's quite rock and roll! However, the honeymoon period is well and truly over. The trial of the former CEO of Raiffeisen and his accomplices began on 25 January in Zurich. Pierin Vincenz and Beat Stocker are the two main defendants. Charges include accusations of fraud for commercial gain, disloyal management, forgery and acceptance of bribes. Regardless of the ruling, the man from Grisons will not be returning to the top job.

All in all, what could this instability cost the banking establishment? No one knows. Here is one figure: since 2008, Credit Suisse has reportedly paid over 15 billion dollars to the United States in legal fees and fines alone, according to estimates cited in the newspaper, *Le Temps*. The moment has perhaps come for an *aggiornamento*, as they say in the world of banking.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

## Increasing the retirement age – a thorny issue

The Federal Council and a parliamentary majority want to increase VAT as well as the retirement age for women from 64 to 65 as a means of safeguarding the Swiss pension system (AHV). In particular, the prospect of raising the retirement age is deeply contentious, given that further increments have been mooted for the future. Voters will now give their verdict on this latest AHV reform, after a broad alliance of campaigners managed within a short space of time to collect enough signatures for a referendum, which is due to be scheduled for autumn 2022. (MUL)

## The FDP rediscovers nuclear energy

The Liberals (FDP) used their party conference to express support for new nuclear power plants, albeit with some caveats. Thierry Burkhart, the new FDP party leader, stressed that his party was not calling for new plants to be built immediately. Nevertheless, prerequisites for building the latest-generation nuclear power stations needed to be created. In other words, an as yet unavailable technology is now incorporated in the FDP's energy policy. Despite the lack of detail, this move comes as a U-turn. Burkhart's predecessor Petra Gössi had endorsed phasing out nuclear energy. (MUL)

## Switzerland's most extreme-right party disbands

The Swiss Nationalist Party (PNOS) announced its dissolution in February. Founded in 2000, the PNOS was classed as a far-right organisation by the Federal Office of Police as early as 2001. By no means does the fall of the PNOS translate into the fall of the Swiss far right per se. According to party leader Florian Gerber, a “specific project of national character” is already in the pipeline. Right-wing extremists have recently been involved in various anti-Covid protests, and have led some of these demonstrations themselves. (MUL)

## Winter medal haul

The Swiss team returned from the Beijing Winter Olympics with seven gold medals. Beat Feuz and Corinne Suter crowned their careers with gold in the downhill, and Michelle Gisin in the alpine skiing, while Lara Gut-Behrami won the super-G. Giant slalom specialist Marco Odermatt also took home gold, as did Mathilde Gremaud in the freeski slopestyle and Ryan Regez in freestyle skiing. Switzerland completed its Beijing medal haul with two silver and six bronze. (MUL)

# I need nature in the city.



Zurich, Zurich Region, © Zurich Tourism, Fabian Scheffold

# I need Switzerland.

It's time for sustainable travel – we call it Swisstainable.  
Find out more: [MySwitzerland.com/swisstainable](https://www.myswitzerland.com/swisstainable)

