

OCTOBER 2022

Swiss Review

The magazine
for the Swiss Abroad



**Things are worsening for Swiss research –
unexpectedly sidelined in Europe**

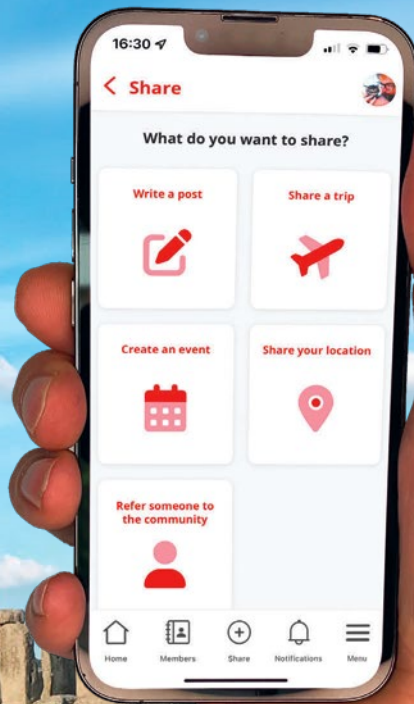
**The village of the powerful –
Ebersecken, the stronghold of rope pulling**

**Heating with oil has no future in Switzerland –
yet there are thousands of new oil heaters**

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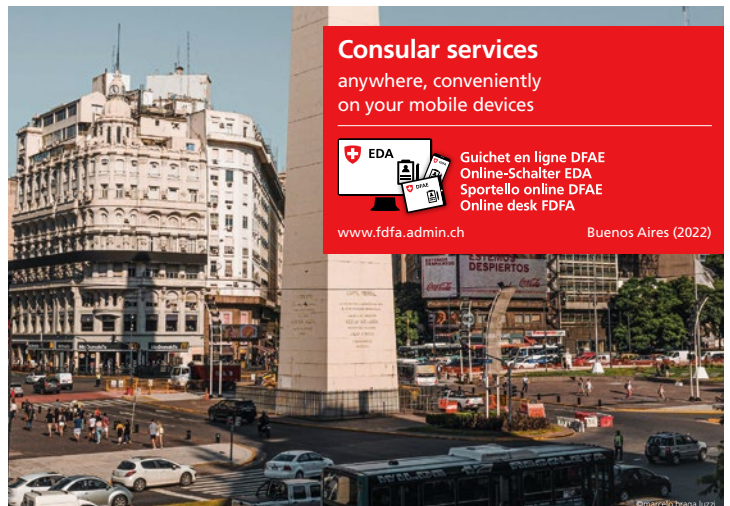
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Buenos Aires (2022)



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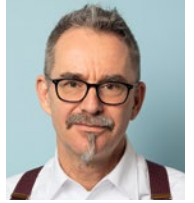
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Title image: Researcher Thomas Hott performs installation work at CERN, the research centre for high-energy and nuclear physics in Geneva.
Archive photo: Keystone (2004)

The great tug of war



Opening all the windows bright and early in the morning, letting the coolness of the night flood into the house, then closing all the windows again, drawing the curtains and blocking out the sweltering heat of midday. This became a daily ritual for many in Switzerland this summer. According to countless Swiss weather stations, July 2022 was the month with the most sunshine and was also the hottest since measurements began in 1886.

Meanwhile, unaffected by the tremendous heat, the glacial period currently reigning between Switzerland and the European Union (EU) continues. The relationship is decidedly frosty. As you may recall, in May 2021, Switzerland broke off negotiations on the future framework agreement for Switzerland-EU relations. It did so on the assumption that this radical step would jumpstart new talks. That was most likely a mistake.

So far, we are only seeing the negative impacts of the breakdown of negotiations as they relate to Switzerland, which has been demoted to the status of a third country without privileges in joint European research initiatives. This puts research in Switzerland at a disadvantage and weakens it, as we show in this issue's Focus (page 4). These new constraints weigh heavily, because Switzerland considers education and research as one of its most important “commodities”.

The Federal Council has long been criticised for lacking a plan to repair relations with the EU. At its meeting in Lugano on 19 August 2022, the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) also concluded that the federal government must now act more decisively. The main concern for the CSA is the free movement of persons, which affects the daily lives of 440,000 Swiss living in the EU and which the Council fears is slowly being eroded.

The current tug of war between Berne and Brussels resembles a rope-pulling competition in which one of the teams decides it would be a good idea to just let go of the rope for a while in the belief that they will be able to get a good grip on it again afterwards. This strategy probably wouldn't gain much respect in Ebersecken, Lucerne, where one of the most successful rope-pulling clubs in Switzerland shapes social life (page 12). We stopped by to let the dedicated rope pullers there show us how perseverance and unity are just as important as brute force in this sport.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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





Swiss researchers fear isolation

With researchers leaving the country, professors reluctant to work at Swiss universities, and Swiss students feeling disadvantaged, research in Switzerland is experiencing hard times. The reason? An unresolved relationship between Switzerland and the EU. Within the world of European research, Switzerland has become a “third country” without privileges.

DENISE LCHAT

“We’re a small country that has always relied on recruiting foreign researchers,” says Michael Hengartner, President of the ETH Board. According to him, that’s why there is an international atmosphere at all Swiss universities, which is conducive to the integration of people from abroad.

Ecosystem for top research

Knowledge and education are among Switzerland’s most important resources. This is reflected in its high-performing educational system, first-class infrastructure,

and universities that regularly achieve the top spots in international rankings. Hengartner describes it as a veritable “ecosystem” that promotes cutting-edge research and has a solid, flexible – yet at the same time competitive – funding system. “Of course, we’re also able to offer excellent working conditions,” adds Martin Vetterli, President of EPFL Lausanne. He goes on to explain how the density of renowned scientists in Switzerland is far above average, which in turn attracts more young talent to the country. Or should that be “attracted”, based on the current situation? The breakdown of negotiations with the EU over a framework agreement has had severe

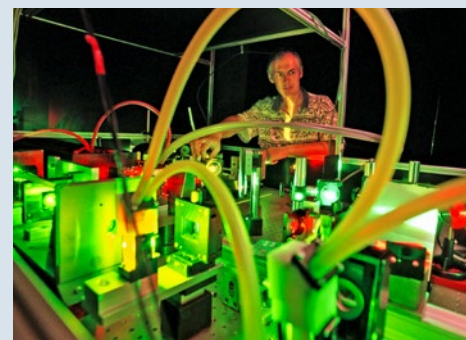
Cutting-edge European research – in Switzerland. Two scientists involved in semiconductor research at the EPFL University of Applied Sciences in Lausanne. Photo: Keystone



Swiss landmark achievements in EU research

What concrete results does Switzerland see from the European research funding programmes, and what benefits does it receive from the collaborations? Yves Flückiger, University of Geneva Rector and President of swissuniversities, is ready with his answer.

■ **CERN:** This research laboratory is the cradle of European research. Founded in 1954 near Geneva on the border between Switzerland and France, it was one of the first-ever joint European projects and today boasts 23 member states. This scientific facility was further strengthened in 1984 by the European research framework programmes. Flückiger: “These programmes played a decisive role in the development of basic research and its integration in industrial applications, in particular by promoting cooperation between laboratories and companies.” Since 2012 and the discovery of the Higgs boson, CERN has been a household name around the world.



The CERN research laboratory near Geneva boasts an enormous facility for researching the tiniest of particles.

Photo: Keystone

consequences for research. Switzerland was downgraded by the EU to a “non-associated third country” in its research framework programme, resulting in Switzerland losing its previous position and influence within Horizon Europe, the world’s largest programme for research and innovation with a budget of almost 100 billion euros for a period of seven years (2021–2027). Compared to the 79 billion euros backing Horizon 2020, the previous programme in which Switzerland was still an associated partner, the funding has been increased significantly.

Switzerland loses its access to the “Champions League”

Although Switzerland may not be fully excluded from collaborating with its most important research partner, Swiss researchers are no longer able to lead large joint projects or receive grants from the European Research Council (ERC). Hengartner refers to these ERC grants as the “Champions League of research”, while EPFL Presi-

■ **BioNtech:** The first messenger RNA vaccine against Covid-19, which was the direct result of research funded by the European Research Council over the past 20 years, was probably the most outstanding recent result of research transfer.

“This vaccine was created by BioNtech, a European biotechnology company whose founders Ugur Sahin and Özlem Türeci, both of whom come from Turkish immigrant backgrounds in Germany, were funded by the European Research Council,” comments Flückiger.

■ **ID Quantique:** Flückiger cites ID Quantique as another example. It was founded in Geneva in 2001 by four scientists from the University of Geneva, who received key funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) as well as from various European programmes. ID Quantique has now developed from a small spin-off into the world’s leading provider of solutions for secure quantum cryptography. Investors include telecom giants SK Telecom (South Korea) and Deutsche Telekom. ID Quantique has its headquarters in Geneva and maintains close relationships with academic institutions by participating in several Swiss, European and Korean R&D programmes focused on bringing innovation to market.

(DLA)

A scientific “Champions League”: Horizon Europe is the world’s largest research programme with a budget of 100 billion euros for 2021–2027.

dent Vetterli can speak from his own experience: “I would not have been able to advance my research in digital signal processing as far as I did without an ERC grant of almost two million euros over five years.” Yves Flückiger, President of swissuniversities, also points out that Swiss researchers are completely excluded from several key areas of research, including the flagship programme for quantum research, which is of strategic importance for driving forward digitalisation; the construction of the international nuclear fusion reactor ITER, where Switzerland has been involved in project management since 2007; and the Digital Europe programme, which focuses on high-performance computing, artificial intelligence and cyber security.

The brain drain has already begun

According to Vetterli, Switzerland used to be among the most active of the associated countries involved in EU research, especially in the fields of health, environmental studies, climate, and quantum technology. Now, however, it has been sidelined for over a year, despite the financial

Research in Switzerland is more internationally linked than in almost any other country, with two-thirds of the researchers who work in Switzerland having completed their doctorates abroad.

efforts of the federal government, which has stepped in with interim funding of 1.2 billion Swiss francs. Vetterli reports on start-ups that originated on the EPFL campus and are now opening offices in Europe to ensure they continue to attract talent and can benefit from European funding, while Flückiger has heard of the first group of researchers who have already left Switzerland for France, Austria and Belgium along with their ERC grants. And Hen-



Switzerland-EU relationship crisis drags on

Roughly a year after negotiations for a framework agreement broke down, Switzerland is making a new attempt to regulate its future relations with the EU. However, the road to finding a viable solution between Berne and Brussels is still long – and marked by mistrust on both sides. Furthermore, there is no broad-based consensus within sight on the home front.

gartner notes that candidates for professorships at the two Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology are now all enquiring about Switzerland’s prospects for reassociation in the near future.

Switzerland’s prosperity is at stake

Working in isolation is unthinkable in the field of research, not to mention the sphere of innovation. As a reaction to Switzerland’s non-association, the renowned Geneva-based company ID Quantique (more information in the box on page 5) has opened a branch office in Vienna to maintain access to Horizon Europe. Flückiger states that the 100 jobs which would otherwise have been created in Switzerland are now in Vienna. In Switzerland’s case, Horizon Europe not only affects its research and the researchers who are worried about their top positions. It

Testing the choppy waters in Brussels:
Swiss State Secretary Livia Leu.
Photo: Keystone

After pausing to mull things over, the Federal Council decided in February 2022 to retackle the EU dossier. Instead of an “unpalatable” framework agreement, the government is now relying on a package containing various elements. The aim is to secure access to the European internal market, enable new agreements – e.g. for electricity – and restore associations with EU programmes such as Horizon Europe. Institutional issues, like which jurisdiction has authority in the event of a dispute, would be regulated separately in each case. The crux of the matter is that the EU Commission has so far explicitly refused to consider a procedure that would regulate these fundamental issues “on a case-by-case basis”. It also maintains that the European Court of Justice should be involved in disputes, a proposal that faces strong political resistance within Switzerland. The Federal Council nevertheless hopes there will be a growing realisation at EU headquarters that maintaining the bilateral approach is also in its own interest.

Since the spring, Livia Leu, the state secretary responsible for the dossier, has been testing the waters in Brussels. As of press time, several meetings between the negotiators had taken place. Nevertheless, it will probably take some time yet before new negotiations are held at the highest political level. The Federal Council does not want to decide on a mandate until there is “a sufficient basis” for it. So far, the positions are still “wide apart”, as the Federal Council made clear in mid-June. No sign of a thaw yet.

also influences students and professors who are suddenly hesitant about coming to Switzerland. And Horizon Europe is also vital for the transfer of technology, which leads to the founding of start-ups and SMEs as well as job creation in companies and the field of research. Essentially, the university representatives all agree that Horizon Europe plays a key role in Switzerland’s prosperity and position as an economic hub.

Flückiger believes that the Federal Council should not start focusing on securing new research partnerships outside the EU, since research competition takes places primarily between the EU, the USA and China, which is why Switzerland’s non-association remains the true problem.

When questioned, the EU delegation’s response is that Swiss researchers have always been welcome and valued partners in EU research programmes – and they still are. “Swiss researchers are allowed to participate in Horizon

Overshadowed by the 2023 elections

Within Switzerland there is no consensus on how to proceed with the EU issue either. The parties are trying to outdo each other with their own strategies and action plans – while at the same time lamenting that no progress is being made in finding a solution. In the view of political analyst Fabio Wasserfallen, professor of European politics at the University of Bern, the fact that the Federal Council is not moderating the debate conducted in Switzerland more forcefully is evidence of a leadership vacuum: “Unfortunately, there is a disconnect between domestic and foreign policy.” According to Wasserfallen, the task of reunifying these two should fall to the Swiss government. “The package must be broadly accepted at a political level if it is to have a chance in a referendum.” If this is achieved, the Federal Council could use realistic models to demonstrate how Swiss interests would be safeguarded and any concessions well mitigated. “To accomplish this, the committee would have to agree on a common approach and follow it through in the longer term.” Yet the more time that passes, the more the tendency will be to wait for the federal elections in autumn 2023, concludes the political analyst. Depending on how the different parties fare, the cards will be reshuffled as the new government takes shape. “Ideally, however, there should still be opportunities to discuss the pros and cons of the Federal Council’s EU plan before the elections.” This would make everyone show their hand in the coming election year.

THEODORA PETER

Europe projects under the conditions that apply to non-associated third countries. To obtain full association, which includes eligibility for EU funding, the EU regulation requires third countries to enter into an umbrella agreement governing the conditions and terms of association. Further developments on this issue must be considered in the context of the overall relationship between the EU and Switzerland.”

The EU is therefore putting pressure on Switzerland to comprehensively define its relationship with its European neighbours. Until then, the EU sees no reason to give Swiss research any preferential treatment. So far, neither the efforts of Swiss diplomacy nor an appeal by researchers have altered the situation. ETH Board President Michael Hengartner states that this situation is not only detrimental to Swiss researchers, but also to European research itself: “This is unequivocally a lose-lose situation.”

Louis Nusbaumer aka 'Ara'



His totem name is Ara. Why choose this for his scouting nickname? Louis Nusbaumer, a 21-year-old student of geography and environmental sciences, no longer remembers. He was seven when he became a Cub. Today, Ara is the chief of the Venture Scouts, a group of 15- to 17-year-olds from the St-Michel scouting group in Delémont, canton of Jura. Like thousands of other scouts, he was involved in the 'mova', the federal camp for the Swiss scout movement, which took place this summer in the Goms valley (VS). Ara arrived at the camp before it opened, along with other chiefs of the Venturers unit from the cantons of Jura and Berne. The group built a log tower in the camp. "The view was stunning. We connected four tarpaulins to make a roof for ourselves," he tells us. Amongst other activities, the Venturers helped build a giant tree hut. They strolled around freely in this enormous camp of 30,000 scouts. There was only one rule: stay together and be contactable by phone. "We spent two weeks living together and that created some very strong bonds," smiles Ara, for whom one of the key values in scouting is acceptance of oneself and of others. Why have a uniform? "Scouting comes from the army, so it's from there," comments the young man, considering this a reasonable question. In scouting language, the uniforms distinguish between different age groups: turquoise shirts for the Cubs, beige for the Scouts, red for the Venturers and green for those in charge. Within the St-Michel scouting group, the leaders have chosen to wear red, "to remain closer to the Venturers". Will Ara be at the next 'mova', in 14 years' time? "Why not? The movement always needs volunteers," says Nusbaumer.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

National Bank posts loss of 100 billion francs

The Swiss National Bank (SNB) reported a loss of almost CHF 100 billion in the first half of 2022. This was the SNB's biggest loss in its over 100 years of existence. Falling shares and interest-bearing securities were the primary cause of the decline, which was forecast by experts. A loss of this magnitude is of particular concern to the cantons and federal government since part of the SNB's earnings is distributed to them. It is still unclear what the record loss means for the anticipated distributions. (MUL)

Tough fight against fighter jets

The Swiss military intends to purchase new Lockheed Martin F-35 fighter jets from the USA for six billion francs. However, a popular initiative signed by 103,000 people in mid-August aims to prevent this. The petition's initiators believe the government's choice of jet is unsuitable and too expensive. The initiative puts the Federal Council in a quandary, because the US government's purchase offer for the aircraft is only valid until the end of March 2023, but time constraints mean it would be almost impossible to put the initiative before voters by then. Not putting the initiative to a vote at all, however, would be problematic for democratic policy. (MUL)

Geneva Motor Show cancelled for fourth time

The Geneva International Motor Show will not take place in 2023, either. This is the fourth time in a row that it has been cancelled, with the first cancellations caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Now, organisers are blaming the global economic situation and geopolitical uncertainties. Whether the show, which usually attracts well over half a million visitors each year, still has a future is becoming increasingly unsure. The motor show is also facing an uphill battle because climate change is altering the perception of the car as a status symbol – it now has connotations other than absolute personal freedom. (MUL)

Dying fish in Swiss rivers

The sustained extremely high temperatures this summer are leading to dry riverbeds and warmer lakes in Switzerland. The result is a fish fatality rate of "historic proportions", as the Swiss Fisheries Association warned in mid-August. Water temperatures of over 25 degrees become life-threatening for many fish native to Switzerland, such as trout. (MUL)

Kambundji sprints to EC 200-metre gold

"Sprinter Mujinga Kambundji is aiming high" was the headline in July's "Swiss Review". In the meantime, the 30-year-old from Berne celebrated another glorious moment when she won gold in the 200 metres at the European Championships in Munich in August. She also took silver in the 100 metres after missing out on gold by a hair's breadth. In an interview with the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", the popular athlete stated that she could still run even faster: "I can top that." (MUL)

The Ukraine flag is now a common sight in Switzerland – almost every Swiss school has welcomed Ukrainian children. Pictured: inside the Landhaus school in Herisau (AR). Photo: Keystone



The long shadow of war

Hope of a quick return to their war-ravaged homeland has faded for the over 60,000 Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland. The consequences of the war are also becoming more tangible to the Swiss population with the looming threat of energy shortages during the winter.

THEODORA PETER

More than six months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the horror of war in the middle of Europe has not gone away. The initial hope of many Ukrainians that they would have to flee abroad for a short time only has been dashed. In Switzerland, the refugees are preparing themselves for a prolonged stay. The people who found shelter in the village of Mittelhäusern in Berne (see "Swiss Review" 3/2022) are also trying to reorganise their lives. In the meantime, some of them have been able to leave their host families and move into rented flats.

By now, most refugees have settled well into everyday life in Switzerland, with their children attending school and communication becoming increasingly easy. However, language remains a major hurdle when it comes to finding work. Of the 60,000 Ukrainian refugees in Switzerland, around 33,000 are of working age, but only 10 per cent of them had found a job by the summer. This low percentage is also due to the fact that 80 per cent of the refugees eligible to work are women. Many of them have pre-school-aged children who need to be looked after.

In a survey conducted in July by the research institute Sotomo, more than half of the companies polled expressed a general interest in employing Ukrainians. However, the companies would like more state support for language courses to facilitate integration into the labour market. Potential employers also call for planning security with regard to obtaining residence and work permits for Ukrain-

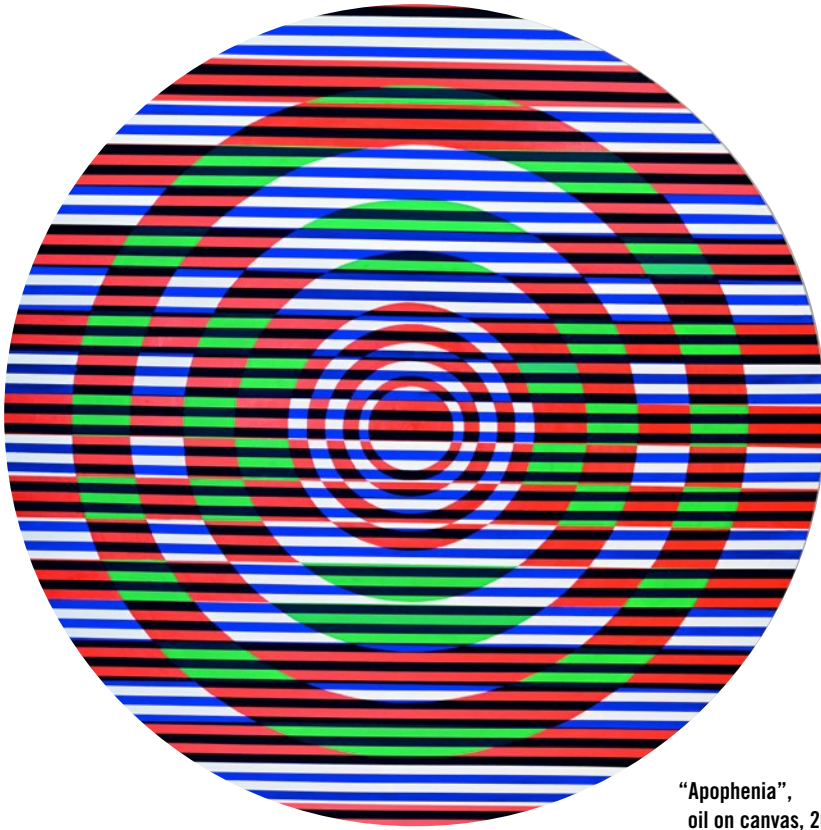
ian employees. Protection status S, which was initially introduced for one year, will expire in spring 2023.

Heat less and save electricity

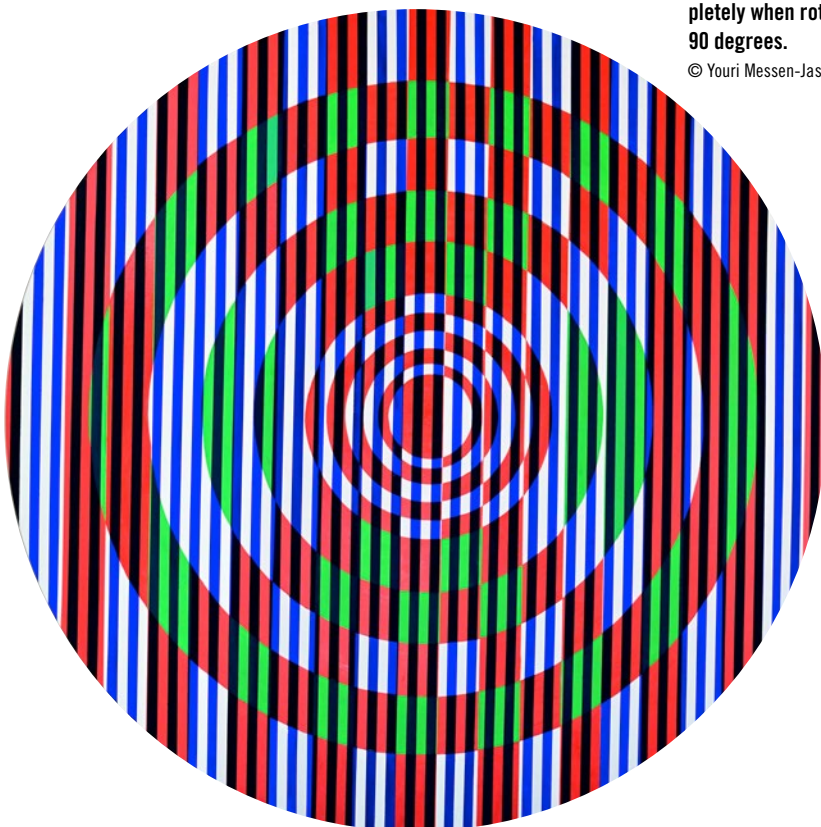
The war in Ukraine is having an impact on energy supplies across Europe, as Russia is using its reserves as leverage and has sharply cut gas deliveries to the West. Many countries are expecting shortages during the coming winter – including Switzerland, where 20 per cent of households heat with gas. The fuel also plays an important role in electricity production and the operation of industrial plants. To make matters worse, Switzerland depends on electricity imports in winter, but energy is becoming scarce all over.

The federal government and the energy industry are opting first to appeal to the general public to save energy, e.g. by taking a shower instead of a bath, turning down the heat, drying laundry outdoors, or switching off appliances completely instead of using standby mode. Voluntary measures could reduce energy consumption by 10 to 20 per cent. State-imposed regulations for lowering temperatures in public buildings and switching off street lights are also conceivable. If none of this helps, gas and electricity rationing for industry and households could even be imposed. In the event of a worst-case scenario, the Federal Council is planning reserve power plants that can also be operated with oil instead of gas if necessary.

Youri Messen-Jaschin, an artist who plays with your brain



**“Apophenia”,
oil on canvas, 2021.
The image’s appear-
ance changes com-
pletely when ro-
tated
90 degrees.**
© Youri Messen-Jaschin



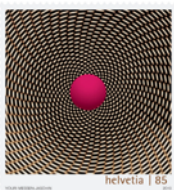
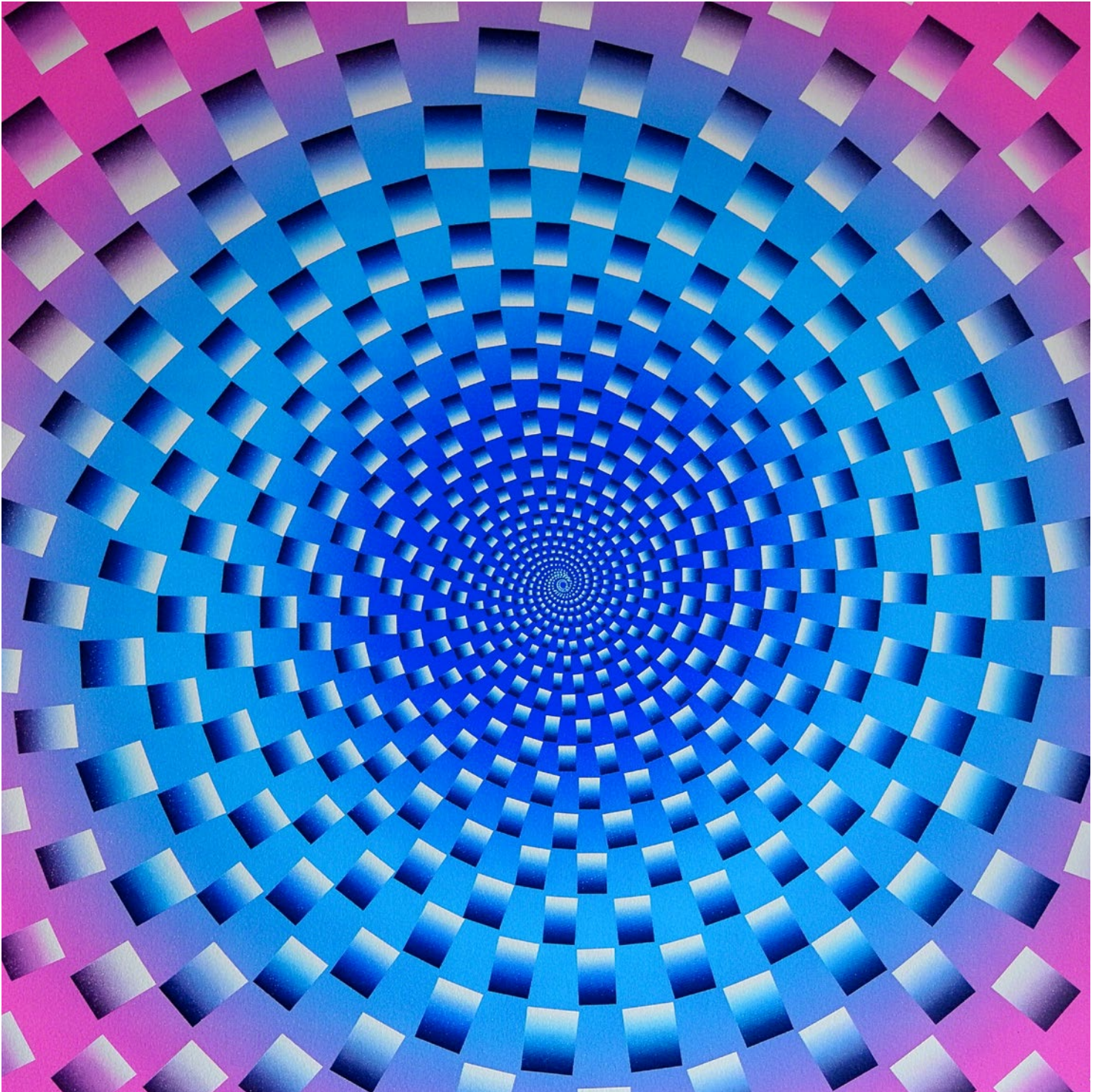
Looking upon the work of Swiss artist Youri Messen-Jaschin gives a slight feeling of imbalance, like after a boat trip. It seems that an image with a strong visual contrast can impact the inner ear, an organ which helps maintain balance. An image sometimes generates effects on the cognitive system of the viewer, because the brain is comparing previously memorised visual elements with current images, which can trigger a certain dissonance. Optical art plays on these mechanisms. Such are the resonances between art and neurology in “l’Op art rencontre les neurosciences” (Op art meets neuroscience), artwork bearing the signature of painter Youri Messen-Jaschin and Bogdan Draganski, the director of the neuroimaging research laboratory in Lausanne.

The two men have observed the brain activity of volunteers using magnetic resonance imaging, while images created especially for the study were projected in front of their eyes. “If Op art has such strong effects on the brain, it could perhaps contribute to relieving certain illnesses, or even curing them,” writes the photographer, painter and sculptor. The artworks combine pure art and explanations on the inner workings of the optical illusions. They can be viewed as an art book and an essay. Of German and Latvian origin, Youri Messen-Jaschin was born in 1941 in Arosa. In his long career he has worked in Paris, Gothenburg, Hamburg, Caracas and Berne. He currently lives in Lausanne.

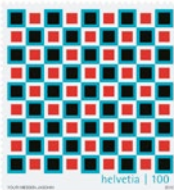
STEPHANE HERZOG

**“Wormhole”,
graphic print
on paper, 2018.**

© Youri Messen-Jaschin



helvetia | 85



helvetia | 100



helvetia | 140

**Youri Messen-Jaschin
at his smallest: “Red
Ball”, “Blue Red
Black” and “Circle
Red Blue” on Swiss
Post stamps (2010).**

Youri Messen-Jaschin, Bogdan Draganski
“L’Op art rencontre les neurosciences”
Editions Favre, November 2021,
175 pages, CHF 34

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Tents dot the Ebersecken sports field in the heart of the Lucerne countryside (image on left). Rope pulling is finally back!

Photos: Danielle Liniger

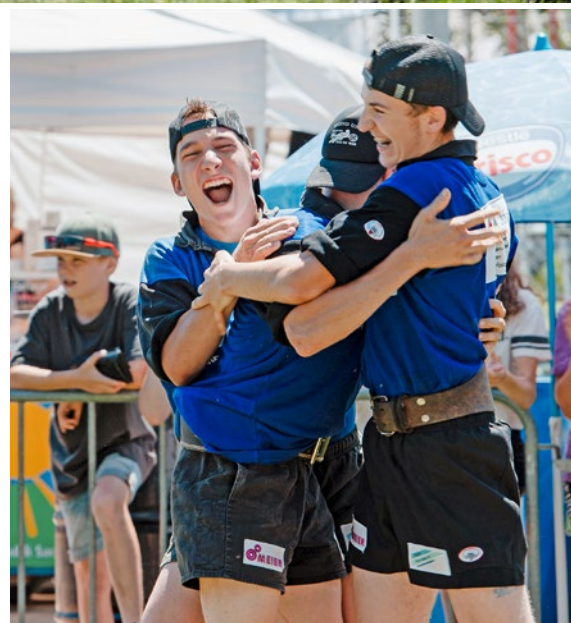


Sticky stuff – athletes rub their hands with resin in order to get a better grip on the rope (image on right).



Gritty determination, quirky hats – the men's team competing at home in the 580-kg category (above).

“Cool team sport” – young rope-pulling stars before and after a pull (images on left and right).



The strong women and men of Ebersecken

In a small Lucerne village, the fringe sport of tug of war is the biggest thing around. The Ebersecken rope pulling club has been the most successful Swiss tug of war association in the last ten years. We stopped by to witness this test of strength that requires team spirit and connects a farming village with the world.

SUSANNE WENGER

On an early July Saturday in Ebersecken, the summer sun shines down on the gently rolling landscape of the Lucerne countryside. Cowbells tinkle, butterflies flutter by. On the sports field near the school, however, there is intense activity in the heat, and the competition sounds loud and fierce. More than 20 Swiss rope pulling teams have come to compete in a championship tournament this weekend in several weight and age categories. The Ebersecken rope pulling club, which organised the event and is fielding five teams, has seized the opportunity and turned the tournament into a three-day village festival.

There's finally a tug-of-war festival in Ebersecken again, after the two long pandemic years. "We're so happy," says Peter Joller, co-president of the club. The 32-year-old weaves his way around the field in a blue team uniform. Despite the difficult situation, the club members did not waste any time lazing around, he is quick to point out. Mixed teams are competing in the under-19 age group, while in the elite categories of 580 and 640 kilograms, the men are on their own this time. Anyone who has never been to a rope-pulling tournament quickly realises that the seemingly archaic competitions are strictly regulated, with set techniques and sequences, weight controls and footwear inspections.

Muscles and mental strength

Pick up the rope! Take the strain! Ready! Pull! These are the commands the referee gives to start a pull. With their left feet rammed into the grass in sync and the 33-metre-long rope gripped tightly between tacky hands, the athletes assume the most horizontal position possible, and the battle for a place in the final begins with great vigour and shouting. The aim



Higher, farther, faster, more beautiful? In search of somewhat unconventional Swiss records.

**This edition:
Visiting the powerhouse of the strongest rope pullers.**

is always to pull the opposing team far enough onto your own side. Anyone who clamps the rope under their arm is warned, and locking or sitting down is also prohibited.

"Hold, hold, hold, downwards, downwards, downwards!" The coaches stand right beside their teams and bark out instructions non-stop. Because of the intense physical exertion involved, mental fitness is also important, explains the club's own field announcer Adrian Koller over the powerful loudspeaker system. One of the youth teams from Ebersecken immediately demonstrates the truth of that statement. Even after two warnings and with defeat looming, the local team doesn't crack and is able to win the preliminary round draw after all. Cheers are heard on and off the field. The marquee fills up, food is served, and the drinks flow.

A fun hobby turns serious

Ebersecken is a rural village, with around 400 people still living here. Two years ago, the village was amalgamated with the larger neighbouring municipality of Altishofen, as Ebersecken was no longer able to operate as a commune on its own. In return, Altishofen won a world championship title for free, as they say in the village, only half-jokingly, when talking about

the victorious rope pullers. The residents of Ebersecken had to give up their old coat of arms featuring a boar, but the bristly animal continues to snort fiercely on the logo of the rope pulling club. And even now, as a district of Altishofen, Ebersecken remains a tug-of-war stronghold.

The Ebersecken elite pullers have won at least one Swiss championship title every year since 2010, and their top national team members have brought home gold medals from three world championships. Their success stems from tremendous determination, intensive training and team spirit, all of which are very evident on the ground. Founded in 1980

Switzerland and its many clubs

The Ebersecken rope pulling club is one of an estimated 100,000 associations in Switzerland, a country that certainly loves its clubs. According to the 2020 Volunteer Monitor, three quarters of the population aged 15 and over are members of at least one club or non-profit organisation, and over 60% are actively involved. The largest group is sports clubs, followed by leisure and culture. Associations have historically been very important in Switzerland, and despite increasing mobility and a trend toward individualisation, experts have not detected a decline in club memberships. The small scale and local flavour are attractive, especially in a globalised world. Associations that embrace innovation have the best prospects. This could involve making use of the internet, for example, or enabling project related involvement. (SWE)

Carmen Rölli and Peter Joller are the volunteer presidents of the Ebersecken rope pulling club. Both also compete in teams.



for amateur tournaments, the club began to set its sights higher and higher. A few members decided to focus on making a big name for the club in sporting circles, comments copresident Joller: “And that’s what we can build on today.” Training takes place at least twice a week during the off-season and almost every day during the regular season. The rope-pulling club has its own training facilities and a weight room.

Social media presence

What’s so appealing about rope pulling that carpenters, structural draughtswomen, civil engineers, and truck drivers are willing to invest a great deal of time and resources in it as a hobby? “Team spirit”, answers Carmen Rölli, “Achieving something together.” The 26-year-old is co-president of Ebersecken rope pulling club and a rope puller herself. “Good



Ebersecken lies between the towns of Langenthal (BE), Sursee (LU) and Zofingen (AG).

friends you can rely on,” says Erich Joller, the 34-year-old who coaches the elite teams. “The fact that everyone looks out for everyone else, from the strongest to the weakest,” adds Sarah Lüönd, a volunteer and spectator at the tournament. Svenja Krauer and Julia Marti, two 13-year-old junior rope pullers, also think it’s a “cool team sport”, but that it needs more women. “Write that down,” they exclaim breathlessly between two pulls.

The Ebersecken rope pulling club intentionally invests in youth development. “We offer young people something positive,” declares co-president

Peter Joller. The club’s catchment area extends into the surrounding municipalities, and he confirms there are currently more than enough interested youth. This is probably also thanks to the club’s up-to-date communication efforts. It has a social media presence as well as innovative analogue ideas. The calendar printed for its 35th anniversary, in which the men’s teams appeared bare-chested, sold out in no time. The club has 110 members, more than half of whom never touch a rope but instead are involved in volunteer work for the association.

2023 World Championships coming to Switzerland

The rope-pulling club has created an identity for Ebersecken, otherwise just one more small village in the middle of Switzerland. It’s important for community life and something to rally around. “The club is making the name of Ebersecken known around the world,” confirms co-president Carmen Rölli. It has already competed in tournaments in South Africa, the USA, Sweden and Spain. And next summer, athletes from 30 nations will descend upon Ebersecken, which has been chosen by the Tug of War International Federation to host the 2023 World Championships. It will be the biggest event in the club’s history. The president of the organising committee is Lucerne Centre Party National Councillor Ida Glanzmann-Hunkeler. She grew up in Ebersecken and comments, “It’s an honour for me.” Rope pulling has “always been one of our regional sports”, says the politician, and the community is proud of the club’s achievements.

Due to space constraints, the actual World Championships venue will be Campus Sursee in the nearby small town of Sursee. According to Glanzmann-Hunkeler, one goal is to increase awareness of the sport of rope pulling in Switzerland. While “Schwingen”, or Swiss wrestling, has become popular and hip in urban circles as well, rope pulling has a low profile. In Ebersecken, however, the sports field erupts in pandemonium



Ready for victory – the Ebersecken youth team psyches itself up for the pull.

Photos: Danielle Liniger



The shoes are custom made, with a metal plate permitted on the heel.



The overall team weight must be correct, with everyone weighing in before the competition.

on this Saturday in July. Amid deafening cheers, the youth team wins its final and claims the championship title once again. The older teams have been falling slightly short of the high expectations this season, but, “We’ll be back,” co-president Peter Joller states reassuringly. He appears relaxed and is beaming. A song by the dialect band Züri West is now playing in the marquee. “Someday happiness will find you,” goes the refrain. In Ebersecken, happiness has found the team hanging for dear life to the end of a rope.

www.szce.swiss
www.tow2023.ch

Pandemic lessons: what has Switzerland learnt?

The Confederation and cantons are writing up Switzerland's handling of the pandemic in various reports. There is a lot of self-congratulatory language, some critical remarks, and one glaring blind spot.

SUSANNE WENGER

No nationwide Covid-19 protective measures have been in place in Switzerland since the end of March. The only reaction by authorities to the unexpected Omicron wave this summer was to recommend that people over 80 reinforce their vaccination protection against severe infections with a second booster, which was proof that Switzerland is keeping to its comparatively restrained course of action. Back in the spring, Health Minister and Social Democratic Federal Councillor Alain Berset had already been quick to pat himself on the back as he answered a journalist's question about Switzerland's Covid-19 track record with "Where other than Switzerland would you have wanted to live during the pandemic?" Nevertheless, Berset promised that the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis would be "unsparingly" investigated.

Good marks, critical remarks

Since then, various reports have been published by the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH), the Federal Chancellery, parliamentary commissions, and the Conference of Cantonal Governments. Overall, the government's pandemic management receives good marks in these publications. The experts commissioned by the FOPH state in their evaluation that "the federal government and the cantons reacted appropriately on the whole, and, with a few exceptions, in a timely manner to the threat posed by Covid-19". However, there are also critical remarks in the analyses. The Swiss crisis organisation in particular was considered to be inadequate. The authorities were also viewed as



Federal Councillor Alain Berset, pictured here at a meeting with hospital staff in Neuchâtel in 2020, promised an "unsparing" review of Switzerland's Covid-19 policy. Photo: Keystone

being insufficiently prepared, e.g. in stocking up on protective masks.

Further findings include the need for the federal government and the cantons to cooperate better in a pandemic situation, and for clarification regarding the involvement of the scientific community. Questions are also raised concerning individual measures implemented to combat the spread of the virus, namely the school closures in spring 2020 and the isolation of elderly people in care facilities. Conspicuous by its absence is any commentary on the low point of the Swiss approach in autumn/winter 2020. Disagreement between the various levels of government led to the authorities initiating measures relatively late, and with no vaccines available yet at that time, there was a temporary marked rise in excess deaths. A large percentage of the more than 13,000 confirmed Covid deaths

in Switzerland to date took place during this phase of the second wave.

This fatal hesitation is only mentioned in passing in the FOPH report. So far, no one other than the president of the Conference of Cantonal Health Directors, Basel politician for the Centre party Lukas Engelberger, has expressed any regret with regard to the review. The lower vaccination rates in Switzerland compared to other Western European countries have not been addressed yet either.

The reports list recommendations, most of which are aimed at improving crisis management structures. It remains to be seen which changes will actually be incorporated into the Epidemics Act and the national pandemic plan. Voices in parliament and the media have already warned that practical lessons truly must be learned from this review – or it will be an exercise in futility.



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Bambi – caught between life and death

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3,000

Fawns sheltering in long grass do not run off when a farmer approaches with a mowing machine, meaning they are often killed – literally cut to pieces by the machine. Happily, help is now at hand from the air. The Rehkitzrettung fawn rescue organisation scours tens of thousands of hectares of meadowland with drones before mowing begins. This enabled 3,000 fawns to be located and saved this year alone. Perhaps this will change our view of drones?



470

At around the same time there was an explosion – not at the federal camp but in sales of small electric heaters in Switzerland. Galaxus, the largest Swiss online shop, sold 470 per cent more space heaters in July than in the same month last year. Buyers are responding to the fear that this coming winter may see a shortage of gas for heating.

30,000

Speaking of drones, they were the only means able to capture the unbelievable scale of the BuLa 2022 federal camp, the largest Swiss Scout camp of all time. The tent city, where 30,000 scouts enjoyed hot summer days, stretched almost four kilometres across the valley floor in Goms (VS). – www.mova.ch/bula



3

While the country is talking about reducing water and energy usage, the young people at the federal scout camp actually put it into practice. The sweaty scouts were able to shower for a maximum of three minutes per week. The strict showering schedule involved one minute of water to wet yourself, two minutes without water to soap up, then two minutes of water to rinse off. And cold water only, of course.

27

All of the figures quoted here are verified and correct. It's important to note this, because there are also many in Switzerland who would agree with the statement: “The media lie and politicians manipulate us”. According to a new survey, 27 out of 100 Swiss share this view and are considered conspiracy theorists. What is most astonishing, however, is that this number actually decreased at least 25% during the coronavirus pandemic. Researchers explain this may be due to the vehemence of some critical commentators, which alienated many who are naturally inclined to accept conspiracy theories.

Switzerland will have to disconnect one million fossil fuel boilers

The climate emergency calls for the abandonment of oil and gas boilers. Technical solutions exist, but the manpower and materials are lacking. Thousands of new fossil fuel boilers are still being installed.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

The one million oil and gas boilers which heat Swiss homes will have to be replaced by heat pumps, geothermal energy, or, outside the towns, by wood heating. These solutions will enable a reduction in CO₂ emissions of approximately 30 percent. “It’s not a hard choice, because replacing an oil boiler by a heat pump is simple. There is also a political angle behind energy renovations: we see we can no longer rely on fossil fuel energy produced abroad,” says Stéphane Genoud, professor in energy management at the HES-SO Valais-Wallis.

Cantonal laws are gradually imposing the replacement of oil and gas boilers by sustainable systems. But a proportion of the population still considers cost a priority. In 2021, there were still more than 17,000 fossil fuel boilers installed, compared to 33,000 heat pumps. Heating companies did not hesitate to offer cut prices for replacement oil boilers, in anticipation of the entry into force of these

new laws. This was particularly evident in Glarus, St Gallen and Zurich. “This pro-oil trend will impact future generations, because these boilers will still be burning oil for a quarter of a century to come,” says Stéphane Genoud. The former electrician estimates that the curve in CO₂ production in Switzerland and throughout the world will lead to an increase in global warming of 3-4 degrees between now and 2050, with immeasurable consequences for the country.

The heat pump at the centre of the energy transition

The flagship tool of the transition is the heat pump. This apparatus, which extracts heat from a liquid source or from the air, is today fitted in approximately one in five buildings in Switzerland. Its installation is supported by the Confederation, the cantons and certain communes.

A typical sight in Switzerland. Deep holes are drilled using a mobile drilling rig for a geothermal probe. The aim is to heat homes with thermal energy from the ground.

Photo: Keystone



“With an electrical source of one kilowatt hour, a heat pump using water can produce up to 4.5 kilowatt hours of heat. This remains a valid solution, even in the event of electricity price rises,” explains François Guisan, who manages a sustainable development advice bureau in Geneva. Ideally, this system is powered by solar panels. In Geneva, there is a building made up of 260 rental apartments which uses this type of heating solution, for example.

“If the boiler renovation goal is set at 25 years, the renovation rate should be 4 percent, but it is currently closer to 2.3 percent,” calculates Fabrice Rognon, a member of the committee of the *Groupement professionnel suisse pour les PAC* (Swiss professional association for heat pumps). The engineer also draws attention to the installation of oil boilers in new builds. “To reach zero carbon emissions, we need to stop installing fossil fuel boilers altogether!”

Households hostage to fossil fuel energies

Concern over the costs of non-fossil-fuel heating plays a crucial role in this phenomenon. “A gas or oil boiler costs less, but over time, a heating system using a heat pump will be more economical, not forgetting that households’ exposure to the costs of fossil fuel energies is high, with rising prices,” points out Guisan. This specialist recently led the energy renovation of a luxurious home in the Geneva countryside. The boiler consumed 9,000 litres of oil per year. The installation of pellet-fueled heating cost 80,000 Swiss francs. The advantages? Produced in Switzerland, wood is less expensive than oil, and its greenhouse gas emissions are up to ten times lower than fossil fuels. In this canton, the installation of oil boilers is prohibited as of 2022.

The question of the costs of energy renovations obviously concerns those renting properties. “In order to carry out renovations, it will be necessary to increase the rent, which tenants will reject. Landlords will first have to accept that in ten years, the results of mortgage rate drops have not been translated into their rent prices. Pro-tenant lobbyists will also have to step up and do something about this, because in the end, the renovation will be more economical than the status quo,” reasons Stéphane Genoud.

Promoting energy renovation professions

Switzerland does not have enough trained individuals to carry out this work. “We are missing 300,000 installers,” estimates the professor from the canton of Valais, who mentions having developed a work and training programme aimed at young, unemployed graduates in the Maghreb region. “They would return to their country after



a few years spent working in Switzerland with skills and capital.” Genoud highlights the fact that a number of professions are set to gradually disappear. “With electric cars, mechanics will no longer be as useful. They could install solar panels instead,” he argues.

Marc Muller, manager of a company specialising in energy renovation in Yverdon, envisages a sort of movement. “A student who has finished their studies in sociology and who is planning to leave to complete a world tour on their bike could be advised to become a carpenter,” he suggests. He emphasises that there is already a five-to-eight-year waiting list for the energy renovations for large buildings. For Genoud, the training system in Switzerland should encourage professions related to renovations. “Installing heat pumps is an attractive profession which pays well,” he confirms.

Rejected at a referendum in 2021, the law on CO₂ provided for support mechanisms for renovation works. “The Confederation should buy heat pumps by lots of 10,000, like it did for masks during Covid-19,” suggests the Valais professor. Because another shortage is looming, which also concerns solar panels and insulation materials. In April, the Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy Committee of the National Council declared itself in favour of an indirect counter-project to the glaciers initiative, a text which advocated a linear reduction of greenhouse gases to achieve zero carbon in 2050. The counter-project in question suggested the implementation by the Confederation of an extraordinary programme worth 2 billion francs over ten years to replace the installation of fossil fuel boilers and to facilitate the energy-efficient renovation of buildings.

A chimney sweep cleans an oil furnace and has many more to do. Although they are growing obsolete, a surprising number of new oil heating systems are being installed. Photo: Keystone

The “Flight with Elisabeth” was in reality a flight toward death

Walter Ackermann (1903-1939) made flying popular, but he was also aware of its negative side.



CHARLES LINSMAYER

When pilot Walter Ackermann travelled by train from Dübendorf airport to Zurich in the 1930s, fans would chase him all the way into the main railway station to try to obtain a coveted autograph from him. And it is very telling that this is the way he also met the woman whose destiny was to become intertwined with his. However, during his lifetime hardly anyone realised that Ackermann was not only one of the first modern commercial pilots, but also an early critic of excessive air traffic.

Pilot and author

Ackermann was born in Zurich on 19 April 1903. His dream in secondary school was to become a writer, but he gave up the idea after a memorable encounter with James Joyce, the father of one of his classmates – he found he couldn't imagine working on a single book for six years, and he didn't know any lords who might finance him, as he assumed they had Joyce. Instead, he trained as a military pilot and joined Ad Astra Aero as an airline pilot in 1927, switching to Swissair in 1931 and flying European flight routes for a total of 12 years. In spite of his career choice, he continued to develop his writing talent and documented his experiences in widely read books such as “Bordbuch eines Verkehrsfliegers/Logbook of a commercial pilot” (1934) and “Fliegt mit!/Fly with me!” (1937). His greatest success, however, came in 1936 with the epistolary novel “Flug mit Elisabeth/Flight with Elisabeth”. In it he combines the experience of flying with the tender poetic love story between a musician's daughter and the pilot Werner Rickenbach. He also contrasts the young girl's vague yearning for far-off lands with the avi-

ator's realisation that despite the technological allure of his hectic, transient existence, he was in danger of losing sight of his true, deeper purpose. As the novel ends, Rickenbach, determined to give up flying, is head-

“You see, that is the tragedy of our life suspended between one place and another. We always stay just a few hours; we are always just guests. We don't put down roots anywhere. And we see so much that we no longer see anything at all. Isn't being a pilot like being in thrall to a woman, a captivating, unique woman, while knowing that all the love and suffering surrounding her is basically worth nothing?”

Walter Ackermann, “Die halbe Million/The half million”, in “Flug mit Elisabeth und andere Aviatica”, Huber-Verlag, Frauenfeld 1999.

ing back to his Elisabeth in a DC-3, and as he listens to the “Bells of Home” wafting through his headphones on Radio Beromünster, C. F. Meyer's poem “Was treibst du, Wind?/What are you doing, wind?” comes to mind. The poem describes the ringing of bells echoing across a lake, and the author leaves it open to the reader's imagination whether they are funeral or wedding bells.

Poetry and the (bitter) truth

Unlike most fiction, however, the love story portrayed in the novel really

happened. Walter Ackermann's Elisabeth was Zurich hairdresser Erna Fisch (1910-2007), who approached him on the train from Dübendorf to Zurich in 1930 and whom, during a turbulent relationship, he wanted to mould into a refined lady like Elisabeth in the novel. The wedding date was finally set for the beginning of August 1939. Sadly, it was not meant to be. Following a scheduled flight from Zurich to Vienna and back on 20 July 1939, Ackermann was planning to accompany his fiancée in the evening to choose the crockery for their future household. Passing over Friedrichshafen, however, the twin engined Ju 86 was already flying with only one engine, and when Ackermann tried to make an emergency landing in Constance, the second engine also failed. The plane crashed straight into the ground, killing all six people on board. At Ackermann's funeral, the crash was attributed to pilot error out of a twisted sense of loyalty to Germany as an aircraft-manufacturing giant, although everyone at Swissair knew that the plane had glaring defects. Erna would later receive a final letter from Walter that had been mislaid, in which he pondered melancholic thoughts about life and death while in Amsterdam on 15 July 1939 and quoted a verse just as Werner Rickenbach did at the end of “Flug mit Elisabeth”. This one was by Gottfried Keller and the translation reads: “God, what have I then done / that I am without a spring mate, / that, without even one sweet kiss / I must die unloved?”

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Available in bookstores: Walter Ackermann: “Flug mit Elisabeth und andere Aviatica”. With a biographical afterword edited by Charles Linsmayer. Reprinted by Huber No. 15, Huber-Verlag, Frauenfeld 1999.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST BASED IN ZÜRICH

Keeping house with uncle



REBECCA GISLER
"Vom Onkel".
Atlantis Verlag,
Zurich 2022.
144 pages. CHF 27.
D'Oncle. Ed. Verdier,
Paris 2021.
122 pages. CHF 24.

It is quite the exception when an author publishes a book in two languages. Rebecca Gisler is one such exception. Her book "Vom Onkel" was first published in 2021 in French under the not strictly correct title "D'oncle". This intentional slight error demonstrates her delight in playing freely and creatively with language. The same attitude is evident in the German version as well.

"Vom Onkel" is set in Brittany, in an apparently idyllic village on the Atlantic coast, where little happens and the nearby supermarket is the only attraction besides the local "Vieille Auberge" pub. The narrator and her brother are involuntary housemates, living with their uncle, a thoroughly lovable, corpulent character who suffers from increasing incontinence, bathes less and less, and strews litter about his room. The reasons for this ménage à trois remain as much in the

dark as other family secrets, whose vague outlines are shrouded in silence. Most of the time, a calm serenity reigns in the house and in the lovely garden that surrounds it. The pace only quickens once in a while, such as when the uncle has to be rushed to the hospital or the brother, unnerved, takes off a short time later.

Gisler relates all of this in an understated, peaceful book that is brilliant, above all, in its use of language. She packs her observations into long, intricate and beautifully composed sentences that glide gently along and resonate with readers instead of deterring them. Admittedly, her story does lack a certain edge now and then, namely because the uncle does not disturb neither does he provoke. The travel film about Switzerland and its chocolate delights, which the siblings watch because they were born there, also seems somewhat clichéd. Yet at the heart of it all, life revolves around the uncle. While everyone else turns away from him in disgust or exasperation, the kind-hearted narrator remains loyal to her uncle, which leads her to go searching for him at the end when he suddenly disappears – and finds him about to eat a seagull. The charm of this darkly comedic book lies in the unwavering empathy shown by the narrator, who is completely undeterred by her uncle's antics. This portrait "full of profound humanity" garnered Rebecca Gisler a Swiss literature prize in 2021.

BEAT MAZENAUER

A Frenchman is steering the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra into the fast lane



ARVO PÄRT:
Tabula Rasa,
Capuçon /Orchestre de
Chambre de Lausanne,
CD Erato 2022

It's encouraging to see how dynamic the Swiss chamber orchestra scene has become. Many have realised that simply performing is not enough; smaller orchestras, which are always slightly overshadowed by the major city symphony orchestras, need big names or at least very skilful management to remain in the public eye.

By way of example, violinist Daniel Hope has been bowing his way through the classical world with the Zurich Chamber Orchestra since 2016, while violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja has been igniting the Camerata Bern with her infectious energy since 2018, and pianist David Greilsammer is taking the Geneva Camerata to new heights. The Festival Strings Lucerne and the Basel Chamber Orchestra also tour the world with famous soloists. And now Lausanne is also joining the party.

The Lausanne Chamber Orchestra wants to move into the fast lane. It could succeed, thanks to Renaud Capuçon, who has been its chief conductor since 2021. The French master violinist gained worldwide fame 20 years ago with his cello-playing brother, Gautier.

Be forewarned, however. In Lausanne, Capuçon is not the violin-playing "primus inter pares" who leads the orchestra as the concertmaster, as in Berne or Zurich. Capuçon is the actual conductor of the orchestra – despite the fact that the 46-year-old had never conducted before. How in the world did that happen?

Apparently, he has been waiting for this very question, beaming as he replies: "This is the door to a vast world!" He was already teaching in Lausanne and had performed with the chamber orchestra. He finally conducted it... and got the job.

The first concert was broadcast by ARTE, a month later they played in a prison. One thing is clear: the orchestra wants to play at new venues. Capuçon also attracted new sponsorship money to Lausanne. The orchestra has already released its first CD featuring "Tabula Rasa" by the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt, a piece as mysterious as it is enchanting for two violins, a prepared piano and string orchestra.

The 46-year-old is optimistic about the future. He describes himself as someone who chooses to follow many different paths – and always has. He marvels at those who perform, perform, perform, but he prefers to offer young people opportunities to get on stage in Lausanne. "That's the best thing you can do, help them to advance. If I only played concerts and recitals, I would grow sad."

CHRISTIAN BERZINS

The “Fifth Switzerland” and its strong Helvetic ties

Swiss people 55 years or older have strong ties to Switzerland, even when living in another country. This is shown by a scientific survey on “transnational ageing” that helps to better understand this growing population.

LAURA RAVAZZINI AND LIVIA TOMÁS

Almost one-quarter of the Swiss Abroad are retired. According to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, the proportion of retired people living abroad is rising faster than the proportion of other age groups. Increasing life expectancy and the emigration decisions of individuals close to or at retirement age are the main reasons for this.

In this context, the first Transnational Ageing Survey asked people 55 years or older living in Switzerland about their international mobility. The second Transnational Ageing Survey, which is presented in this article, subsequently focused on the living situation and mobility practices of the Swiss Abroad aged 55 or older. Both surveys were funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and conducted by five researchers from the Institute of Sociology at the University of Neuchâtel and the Geneva School of Social Work. For the second survey, the research team collaborated closely with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, collecting responses from over 43 countries around the world during the Covid-19 pandemic (October 2020 to August 2021). With 10,000 questionnaires sent out worldwide, the survey attracted a great deal of interest and reached a record response rate with a total of 4,689 responses.

The “Fifth Switzerland” aged 55 or older

The “Fifth Switzerland” close to or at retirement age consists of people of several nationalities who regularly travel to other countries around the world. Most of these people have migrated at least once in their life and have lived in their current country of



Our survey has revealed that even though the backdrop to daily life may be decidedly Mediterranean, ties to Switzerland remain strong.
Photo: Livia Tomás

residence for on average 30 years, without necessarily having been born there. A total of 700 respondents said they moved to their current country of residence specifically to spend their retirement there. The population is diverse: around one-fifth are descendants of Swiss who have lived in the country of residence for several generations, have never lived in Switzerland, and who for the most part travel regularly to other countries. Thus, the majority of Swiss

Abroad aged 55 or older consider themselves to be either “local” or “cosmopolitan”.

Attachment to Switzerland

Most respondents have spent on average ten years in Switzerland and maintain close ties with this country. This attachment is also strong among Swiss descendants, who have never lived in Switzerland. In the last five years, Switzerland has been a valued

holiday destination as well as a popular place to regularly meet family and friends, and to buy products that are hard to find elsewhere. In addition, 900 participants said they had visited Switzerland for cultural events, and 450 respondents had travelled to Switzerland for medical treatment.

Simple money transfers

Almost 450 respondents have transferred money to Switzerland in the last 12 months. These financial transactions were made for charitable reasons, to support family members, to pay for trips, or to move money to personal accounts in Switzerland. In addition, the approximately 1,000 participants who had their pension assets transferred from Switzerland to another country found that the process was very or fairly easy. Only five percent encountered difficulties in the process.

Reading, staying informed, and voting

Online newspapers, newsletters and websites are often used to stay informed about Switzerland. Contacts with family members in Switzerland also take place via various means of communication, notably by fixed or mobile phone, as well as via the internet and its applications. Finally, although almost half of the respondents are informed about electoral campaigns and referendums taking place in Switzerland, only a few of the participants actually vote.

Laura Ravazzini is a post-doctoral researcher in the project on “transnational ageing” and co-responsible for the two quantitative surveys.

Livia Tomás is a PhD candidate in the research project on “transnational ageing” and conducted the qualitative interviews with retirees living in Spain and Morocco.



74.3 % usually read a Swiss local or regional newspaper, a newsletter or visit websites to stay informed about the current situation in Switzerland.



21.9 % have bought Swiss SIM cards for their mobile phone to communicate with loved ones in Switzerland or for other reasons.



44.5 % have gathered information about election campaigns and referendums in Switzerland via newspapers, conversations with family and friends, or the red voting booklet.



35.2 % participate in Swiss referendums and elections. The number of people who vote is therefore lower than the number of people who stay informed about political issues.

Emigrating at retirement age: personal voices

As part of the research project, 5 couples and 25 individuals living today in Morocco and Spain shared their personal stories.

Sophie and Laurent Dupraz* are among those who decided to leave Switzerland at retirement age. Ten years ago, they opted to move to Spain for economic reasons. When they were still living in Switzerland, it was important to them to be involved politically and to vote. This has not changed over the last ten years, as Sophie says:

“I think it’s very important to keep myself informed about what’s happening in Switzerland and about the political issues discussed in this country, also for the sake of our children and grandchildren. Because it’s their future. It’s a way, if you like, to still be strongly connected to Switzerland.”

The importance Sophie places on helping to shape the future of Switzerland for her children and

grandchildren is also illustrated by her participation in the climate strike in Switzerland a few years ago. While taking part in referendums and elections did not have the same importance for all interviewees, an interest in staying informed about the economic and societal situation in Switzerland was expressed by many, such as Jean Mauron*, who has been living in Spain for two years:

“I listen to “Radio Suisse Romande” every morning. No matter when I get up, I turn on my computer and listen to the news. I also open “La Liberté” two or three times a week to read the local news from Fribourg. Furthermore, I have a look at the “swissinfo” newsletter.”

*Names changed

The project flyer gives a more detailed overview of the results of the second Transnational Ageing Survey. You can download the document here:



revue.link/en55

“Always focused on people and their circumstances”

Who addresses the pressing concerns of the “Fifth Switzerland”? Who comes to the aid of Swiss travellers who find themselves in an emergency situation abroad? Both these matters fall within the remit of the Consular Directorate (CD) at the Department of Foreign Affairs. Its director, Ambassador Johannes Matyassy, describes the challenge of having to constantly deal with new and extremely difficult problems.

INTERVIEW: MARC LETTAU

Swiss people living abroad like to see themselves as ambassadors for Switzerland. As an official ambassador yourself, you should know. Is this self-perception accurate?

It's certainly true that when you live abroad, you become a walking advertisement for Switzerland. Nevertheless, there is also a place for questioning to some degree this self-construed image so prevalent among the “Fifth Switzerland”.

In what sense?

Every Swiss Abroad leaves behind positive and negative impressions, so everyone shares the responsibility of how Swiss are perceived. This doesn't just apply to those living abroad, however, but also to the many Swiss who travel the world. Whether or not all of them really act as ambassadors is another matter, but we can definitely say that every Swiss Abroad has the potential, at least, to become one.

Almost 800,000 Swiss live abroad. Can Switzerland – or more precisely your Consular Directorate – still manage to address individual cases and concerns?

Swiss living abroad are usually well acquainted with the ins and outs of their country of residence and can manage on their own. For them, our diplomatic representations are a kind of community. More often, it is Swiss travelling abroad who ask us for help and consular protection. Some of these cases are difficult and solving them requires enormous effort.

Such as the case of Natallia Hersche, the Swiss woman arrested in Belarus in 2020? Switzerland did a great deal to secure her release – at least that's how it looked from the outside.

It was indeed a highly complex, politically charged case that attracted enormous media attention. Natallia Hersche is a dual



A native of Berne, diplomat Johannes Matyassy has been director of the Consular Directorate of the FDFA since 2018. Matyassy's previous positions included Swiss ambassador to Argentina and subsequently head of the Asia and Pacific Division in the FDFA. As CEO of Presence Switzerland, the official platform of Switzerland worldwide, Matyassy also focused on Switzerland's activities abroad. He is retiring at the beginning of 2023.

Photos: Danielle Liniger

Swiss-Belarusian citizen. First of all, we had to get the Belarusian authorities to recognise that. Only then could we provide assistance to Natallia Hersche. Our ambassador in Minsk visited her in prison countless times. Furthermore, there were intense negotiations between Switzerland and Belarus on a political level. In the end, the main thing was that we left no stone unturned – but there was no “deal” made with the regime in Minsk.

Then we had the opposite of an isolated case when during the coronavirus pandemic, 4,200 people were flown back to Switzerland on 35 flights.

We're talking about the largest repatriation campaign in the history of Switzerland! At first, we called on people to take responsibility for themselves. Many actually man-

aged to organise their own return journey, but we soon realised that not all of them could do it alone. This phenomenally large-scale operation can hardly be compared with other very complex cases. When rescuing abducted children or bringing young people home from a jihadist camp, for example, things remain extremely tense for months – sometimes years.

Switzerland provides assistance to its citizens abroad in emergency situations. But what does that mean for binational families, where the father might be Swiss, the mother of foreign nationality, the children dual citizens?

That's a very important question which we also had to answer during the pandemic repatriation campaign. At that time, we took a pragmatic approach. You can't tear fami-

lies apart in such cases because the mother – as an example – is Brazilian. We decided that the whole family could travel back to Switzerland together.

Switzerland is committed to addressing the concerns of the “Fifth Switzerland”, but it’s not always successful. I’m sure you’ve heard the complaints of those who want to vote in Switzerland, but in fact cannot.

Yes – and I completely understand their criticism, especially since I myself was a Swiss Abroad. During my time in Argentina, I received the ballot envelope together with the access code that allowed me to vote via e-voting. When the canton of Geneva no longer wanted to continue its e voting system, which was also used by other cantons, and the Swiss Post’s system displayed flaws, it set us back a long way. To make matters worse, the current debate on e-voting in Switzerland is quite different from that in the “Fifth Switzerland”.

Different in what way?

In the debate within Switzerland, security concerns are clearly at the forefront. There must be absolutely zero possibility of fraud because public trust in voting results is a tremendously important asset. Concern about this asset explains the resistance in Switzerland. From my personal point of view, it would be worth examining the possibility of decoupling e-voting, i.e. allowing the “Fifth Switzerland” to use e-voting without launching it for the whole of Switzerland. This seems to me a valid option worth considering – alongside solving the technical challenges that still need to be addressed.

In any case, political interest is high in the “Fifth Switzerland”, with more and more people registering to vote.

This clearly illustrates the close connection they feel to Switzerland – and their great interest in what is happening here. The “Fifth Switzerland” also represents substantial political potential. This is reflected, for example, by the fact that all the major parties are paying attention to this target group. However, the political participation of the Swiss Abroad is still not overly enthusiastic. There are 620,000 eligible voters and only 210,000 registered voters so far, but the trend is rising.



“The ‘Fifth Switzerland’ also represents substantial political potential.”



We’re all getting older – and the FDFA is currently devoting a lot of attention to “Aging abroad”. Would it be true to say you work in a very “senior-focused” way?

No, because we have to look at the overall picture. We pay just as much attention to the inclusion of young people, e.g. when they come of age or by teaching them about Swiss culture and giving them a connection to Switzerland. Our current focus on senior citizens in the “Aging abroad” project is well justified. On the one hand, the number of people over 65 is steadily increasing in many countries; people are getting older. On the other hand, we see a growing number of them emigrating after retirement; people are becoming more mobile. Of course, this also means that new issues become more relevant.

For example?

One question that is becoming more important is: how do aging Swiss Abroad react to suddenly finding themselves all alone? Or what about elderly people who begin to suffer from dementia? Or seniors who have never bothered to write a living will? Such things also pose challenges for the Swiss representations. If we consciously aim our attention at “Aging abroad”, then firstly our focus is on those who intend to emigrate. The emphasis here is on prevention. They need to prepare themselves and consider the question of what growing older abroad means. Secondly, we address those who are already living abroad, getting older – and then retiring abroad. The priority in that case is more on services that might become necessary. For example, as already mentioned, when someone develops Alzheimer’s. A tough topic full of tough questions.

Put simply, is “Aging abroad” an awareness raising campaign?

Absolutely. Ultimately, we are promoting increased self-responsibility, in relation to one’s own aging in this case.

If you want to raise awareness, you have to first be capable of reaching the diverse, multilingual community spread across the globe...

Thankfully, we can take advantage of our excellent network of representations – our embassies, consulates and honorary consuls.

They're important multipliers. In addition, we're currently launching the new app that President of the Swiss Confederation Ignazio Cassis announced at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad 2022.

Another app for what exactly?

The app will make it easier for Swiss Abroad to share experiences and solutions among themselves. Useful answers to many questions can be found within their own community, after all. It will also improve networking between the representations and the Swiss communities abroad.

Not everyone is a fan of networking, though. Aren't there sometimes high expectations that Switzerland itself is the one that should solve any existing problems?

During our visits abroad, we come into contact with very different mindsets. Many Swiss Abroad whom we meet face to face are managing their everyday lives very competently. From time to time, however, we definitely face high – even too high – expectations. It goes something like this: “Switzerland should take care of me because I paid taxes in Switzerland for decades.” On these occasions, I always explain what the Swiss Abroad Act actually states. Above all, try to help yourself first! Only when this fails will Switzerland step in, with a wide range of clearly defined services.

You are retiring at the beginning of 2023.

What do you feel really characterises your personal achievements as ambassador and head of the Consular Directorate?

I can look back on a tremendously exciting period. The work of the Consular Directorate is always focused on people and their personal circumstances. This has really impressed and fascinated me, especially being able to solve the numerous “difficult cases”. In my previous positions, the focus was usually on politics. Here, it was always people, the individual, the human story.

And one very simple question to finish: will you be testing out the concept of “Aging abroad” for yourself?

(laughs) No, I'm determined to implement the concept of “aging in Muri bei Bern”.

Stay informed with FDFA travel advice

If you are planning or undertaking a trip abroad, the FDFA can provide you with information on security-related issues concerning politics and crime in whichever country you are visiting. Register your email address with us to receive all the latest FDFA travel advice for free.

Travel advice

www.eda.admin.ch/reisehinweise
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Ausland +41 58 465 33 33
www.twitter.com/travel_edadfae

FDFA Helpline – your central contact point

The Helpline of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) is your central contact point for all matters relating to consular services. The FDFA Helpline is also ready to assist you in emergencies. Worldwide, 365 days a year, around the clock – by phone, email or Skype.

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Tel. from abroad +41 58 465 33 33
helpline@eda.admin.ch
skype: helpline-eda

Travel Admin – the FDFA travel app

Travel Admin is the travel app from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). The app assists you in preparing for a trip abroad and supports you during your journey with useful functions, information and individually adaptable checklists. The regularly updated travel advice from the

Federal votes

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

The Federal Council has decided not to hold a federal popular vote on 27 November 2022. The next voting date is 12 March 2023.

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



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 “Yes to a ban on the import of fur products derived from cruelty to animals (fur initiative)” (28.12.2023)
- Federal Popular Initiative “Yes to a ban on the import of foie gras (foie gras initiative)” (28.12.2023)
- Federal Popular Initiative “Fair working conditions for truck drivers (Truck Driver Initiative)” (12.01.2024)

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



FDFA is just a tap away, making it an indispensable part of any travel preparation. After registering, you can enter travel destinations and add other travellers and emergency addresses. This enables the FDFA to contact you more easily in case of an emergency. Go ahead and create

a profile, register your trip and travel safely!



Travel Admin

The Travel Admin app is for free in the iOS and in the Android App Shop.

A congress dedicated to the “future of democracy”

The future of Swiss democracy requires the involvement of young people – including young people from the “Fifth Switzerland”. This was one of the central messages at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad 2022 in Lugano.



Advocating in Lugano for youth involvement in politics. Luis Alberto Gostin Krämer (Chile) and Jacqueline Siffer (USA) from the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad. Photo: Adrian Moser

After the long break imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the 98th Congress of the Swiss Abroad on 20 August once again brought together representatives of the “Fifth Switzerland”. It was a chance for making direct contacts, having face-to-face encounters, and finding collaborative solutions – with a focus on “the future of democracy”. “Today we experienced in real ‘real time’ what democracy means, i.e. exchanging views and healthy debating regardless of differences of opinion, whether you live in Switzerland or abroad, or even whether you are Swiss or not,” was how Ariane Rustichelli, Director of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), summed up her personal congress experience in Lugano.

Debates and workshops were held beforehand to further elaborate several core statements relating to the congress theme. The importance of political participation was a central focus. OSA President Filippo Lombardi: “In order for our unique democ-

racy to endure and evolve, we also need the youth from the ‘Fifth Switzerland’ to get involved and actively shape our democracy.” At the congress, members of the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad (YPSA) advocated in favour of lowering the voting age to 16. Rustichelli believes that this request should be met with openness and trust.

It’s back: the perennial issue of e-voting

The right to vote and stand for election is central to political participation. In Lugano, the approximately 400 congress participants from 40 countries reiterated that it should no longer be made difficult or impossible for them to exercise their political rights as granted by Switzerland. Electronic voting is also unlikely to be possible in the 2023 federal elections, meaning that many Swiss Abroad will effectively be excluded from voting. In a differentiated analysis at the congress, correlations were drawn be-

tween the situation of Swiss living abroad and that of foreigners living in Switzerland. One quarter of those living permanently in Switzerland are also excluded from political participation.

This poses “a risk” and “a problem for democracy”, according to historian Kijan Espahangizi, because it is precisely the Swiss Abroad who understand that “multiple affiliation” is not synonymous with a “conflict of loyalties”. He believes that participating in political decisions in both your country of residence and home country actually strengthens democracy.

Although framing it very differently, the congress’s opening speaker, President of the Confederation Ignazio Cassis, drew a similar conclusion. Swiss Abroad see Switzerland from the outside, he stated, and this provides new perspectives and insights. In this way, they pave the way “for Switzerland, as well, to learn from other countries”. (MUL)

Free movement of persons – “Fifth Switzerland” makes its position clear to the Federal Council

The Council of the Swiss Abroad is calling on the Federal Council to take a firm stand in favour of maintaining the free movement of persons. The CSA feels it is essential to guaranteeing the rights of the 450,000 Swiss citizens living in the EU.

At its meeting in Lugano on 19 August, the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), referred to as the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”, voiced its “extreme concern” about the state of relations between Switzerland and the European Union (EU). It stated that the breakdown of negotiations for a framework agreement with the EU would have a particularly negative impact on the 450,000 Swiss nationals living in the EU. The CSA therefore passed a unanimous resolution calling on the Federal Council to adopt a clear and transparent strategy to preserve

Who will be affected by the new Swiss organ donation law?

the free movement of persons. Swiss citizens currently living in the EU benefit directly and in many ways from the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons (AFMP) between Switzerland and the EU, including in the areas of employment, taxes, social benefits, and family reunification. In light of this, OSA President Filippo Lombardi insists that “the free movement of persons must be upheld at all costs”.

First negative impacts

The CSA is concerned because the first negative consequences for Switzerland are already being felt in the wake of the breakdown of negotiations with the EU in May 2021. One example is Switzerland’s demotion within the Horizon Europe research programme (see pages 4-7). In Lugano, the former Swiss ambassador and top diplomat Alexis Lautenberg described the overall negotiating environment as having shifted to the disadvantage of Switzerland. According to him, Brexit, for example, has made Switzerland’s situation more complicated because whereas the UK emphasises “being on the outside”, Switzerland is actually striving for close collaboration with the EU. However, the Swiss position has “completely eroded” since Brexit, says Lautenberg. It is conceivable that the EU could draft a general framework for its relationships with third countries, but he doubts that such a concept would be able to cover Switzerland’s specific needs.

Momentum growing for the E-ID

The CSA also defined its stance on the electronic identity (E-ID) that Switzerland is working towards introducing. The Council is fully in favour of the planned E-ID, because – after the initial proposal failed at the ballot box – a state supported E-ID is now to be developed. From the CSA’s point of view, an E-ID will advance electronic democracy, in particular because it enables the implementation of digitally designed e-voting procedures, making it a beneficial tool for the “Fifth Switzerland”. (MUL)

More about the Congress and CSA meeting: revue.link/lugano

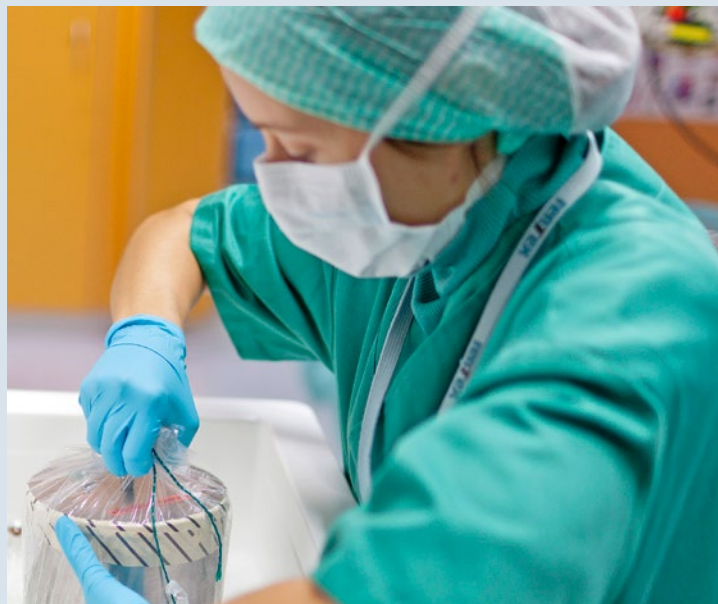
The question: This spring, voters decided to introduce an opt-out system for organ donation. As a Swiss Abroad living in Germany, I am unclear on how this change affects me. Will it apply to all Swiss citizens, including Swiss Abroad? What happens if I die abroad as a Swiss citizen? And what about tourists staying in Switzerland?

The answer: In the referendum of 15 May 2022, the Swiss electorate voted in favour of the introduction of an extended opt-out system for organ and tissue donations. In future, all deceased individuals are to be assumed to be willing organ and tissue donors – unless they explicitly stated otherwise during their lifetime. Since this is what is known as an extended opt-out system, however, the person’s relatives will still be contacted if the deceased’s wishes were not documented anywhere. A relative can prevent the removal of organs or tissue if, in their opinion, this does not correspond to the wishes of the deceased person. If no relatives can be contacted, no organs or tissue may be removed. These changes will come into force at the beginning of 2024 at the earliest. In principle, laws on organ and tissue removal are not based on nationality, but instead operate according to the territorial principle. In concrete terms, this means that a person’s location at the time of death determines which laws apply. The May vote will not change this. Regardless of national-

ity, the opt-out system will therefore apply to anyone who dies in Switzerland – whether they are tourists, Swiss Abroad visiting Switzerland, or people whose permanent residence is in Switzerland.

When Swiss citizens die abroad, the laws of their place of death are applied accordingly. The change to Swiss law is part of a wider trend, as more and more European countries are adopting opt-out solutions. However, there are still exceptions, such as Germany, so it makes sense for Swiss Abroad to research the rules in their country of residence and consider recording their wishes in the relevant registry or document. If you want to be prepared for any eventuality in Switzerland, you can also download and fill out an organ donation card on the Swissstransplant website. This will remain valid even after the amendment to the law comes into force.

Smilla Schär, OSA Legal Department,
info@swisscommunity.org



A donor organ is removed from the cooled transport container shortly before transplantation.

Photo Keystone



“Moving to Switzerland gave me freedom”

The Swiss Abroad Brigitte König came to Switzerland from Latin America for her education. Here she talks about her experiences.

“I grew up in Paraguay, South America. My father had met my mother on a trip around the world and so he emigrated to Paraguay. However, it was very important to him that we grew up speaking German. That’s why I spent my school years at a German school. The school holidays allowed us to travel to Switzerland often to visit my grandparents. This familiarised me with Swiss traditions at an early age.

When I was 16 years old, my father thought it was time for me to move to Switzerland to start professional training. However, I didn’t feel grown up enough and wasn’t ready to leave my life in Paraguay behind. In 2016, at the age of 18, I flew to Switzerland alone with mixed feelings. Only when I arrived in Switzerland did I realise that I was facing a completely new phase in my life. I had left my friends and family behind in South America.

The traditional Paraguayan lives in the here and now and does not give much thought to tomorrow. Spontaneity is one of his strongest qualities and punctuality in South America means “I’m only one hour late.” Swiss punctuality was difficult for me

at first. However, like other Swiss characteristics, I have come to appreciate it because it simplifies everyday life.

I also quickly became aware that Switzerland is a country full of different cultures. People from all over the world, with different religions and languages, can be found in this small country. I liked this multicultural diversity and was always discovering new things.

When I arrived in Switzerland, I worked in a restaurant in Bettmeralp during the winter season. Many of the staff on the alp came from all over the world and I got little of the Swiss culture. When the season ended, I moved in with my grandparents and slowly I made contacts through work and sport. I was also able to make friendships, which made my path easier and continue to this day.

I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do professionally or in which areas I saw my future. So, I decided to do an internship in service at a retirement home in Rheinfelden. After my internship, I did my apprenticeship as a hotel manageress in Basel, where I was able to build a life for myself, make contacts and

cultivate friendships. The apprenticeship allowed me to grow as a person, to discover a passion for the organisational side, to create daily routines and to help with the scheduling of staff.

Since I could not finance myself during the apprenticeship, I had to inquire about a scholarship. I contacted various institutions, including my home canton of Aargau, but unfortunately, I only received rejections. Through my grandfather, I became aware of *educationsuisse*. This organisation supported me in obtaining scholarships from the Willy Müller Foundation and the Hans Freiburghaus Fund of the Foundation for Swiss Abroad. Thanks to *educationsuisse*, I became independent and was able to successfully complete the training of my choice.

Moving to Switzerland gave me freedom, in the truest sense of the word, and allowed me to find and go my own way. The various encounters have shaped me and helped me find my own identity.

In September, I started part-time studies in social work at the University of Applied Sciences Northwestern FHNW in Muttenz. Meanwhile, I continue to work 50 percent as deputy chef de service, breakfast.”

Educationsuisse offers young Swiss Abroad counselling related to education in Switzerland.

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Great experiences, new friendships and lots of exercise – thanks to our summer camps

After a two-year interval, this year's OSA summer camps once again offered memorable experiences for young Swiss Abroad – in the Fieschertal valley (VS), in Jaun (FR), and in a camp that took them all over Switzerland.

The suspension of the summer camp tradition of the Youth Service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic finally came to an end in July 2022. A total of 110 young people from 40 countries took part in three summer camps – in the Fieschertal valley (VS), in Jaun (FR), and in the “Swiss Challenge” camp that crisscrossed all of Switzerland.



Open-air cheese fondue

At the sport and leisure camp in Fieschertal, we spent two incredible weeks together with 46 campers in the heart of the Valais mountains. We made the most of the area's well-known and spectacular suspension bridges and hiking routes. As is customary at the Youth Service camps, we treated ourselves to typical Swiss food, including a classic cheese fondue enjoyed outdoors. However, one thing became very clear – classic Swiss cuisine is not for everyone.

A fun way to learn new languages

The second summer camp began at the end of July in Jaun, Fribourg. The 40 participants spent two weeks exploring the Gruyère region. The camp was also a pioneer of sorts as it was combined with a language course for the first time. During the two-week camp, around half of the campers were able to improve their German or French in the morning classes. There was also a range of exciting activities for those who chose not to

attend the language course. The group programme with all campers participating offered a diverse array of highlights including a visit to a chocolate factory, hiking, and a wide variety of outdoor sports such as football, basketball, volleyball, kin-ball and ulti-



mate frisbee. The hours spent around the campfire and sleeping in a tent also provided memorable moments.

A chat with Ignazio Cassis

And last but not least, the popular “Swiss Challenge” camp started on 6 August and crisscrossed all of Switzerland. The 24 participants spent 16 days travelling through seven cantons and all four language regions. This year the itinerary led from Montreux to Berne, then on to Davos and Lucerne and finally ended in Lugano. One of the camp's definite highlights was a meeting with the president of the Swiss Confederation, Ignazio Cassis (see page 27). It was much more than just a photo opportunity as the young people were allowed to ask President Cassis



all manner of questions. The questions ranged from an explanation of Swiss neutrality, to the voting age of 16 and his favourite football club.

ANNEGERT VOIGT
Leader of the Swiss Challenge camp

FABIENNE STOCKER
Youth Service of the OSA

Photos: Danielle Liniger, Adrian Moser, provided

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Discussion

In Switzerland, 58 out of 100 people live in rented flats. This figure quoted in the “Swiss Review” 4/2022 led many readers to suspect that the resulting lack of freedom and discontent in daily life must be enormous. We researched and discovered that 11,000 complaints were settled in 2021 – because of a barking dog, a smoking barbecue or a noisy neighbour. That’s 30 grievances per day nationwide out of over five million tenants. We feel it’s safe to say that on the whole, Swiss tenants get on very well.



“Wealthy Switzerland is a country of tenants”

ALAIN SAMSON, SINGAPORE

Great article! I’ve often wondered why there are so many renters in Switzerland. The observation that a high proportion of renters is an indication of wealth (rather than the opposite) is particularly interesting. I previously lived in the US and UK, where state pensions are small and home ownership is important for a comfortable retirement.

DANIEL GUT, SPAIN

Poor, rich Swiss. Always living with one foot on the street should the rent contract be terminated or the rent raised once again. Constant pressure not to offend the landlady, let alone demand a reduction in rent. And to top it off, there’s the horror story of the shared washing machine – yikes!

ANTHONY IGBETA, IRELAND

High renting population is an idea to keep the people at a certain level of abnormality. Owning your house does give the owner a sense of financial rest and the Swiss government and banks have made it so impossible for labourers to be able to afford their own homes. It is so wrong.

WILLY WILLEN, USA

No wonder so many Swiss have difficulties when they reach retirement age since they have to pay a large portion of their pension

to landlords. In the US, retired seniors have paid off their mortgage and are enjoying life.

MATTHIAS NIKLAUS, MEXICO CITY

Switzerland is very densely populated, so the price of land is also tremendously high. That’s why high-density living makes sense. It’s difficult to draw comparisons with other countries. Many people can’t or don’t want to take on over a million francs of debt to own their own home. Renting is a good option in Switzerland.

SABRINA MARCHIO STORZ, WA, USA

The psychological state of Swiss tenants is also relevant. How do tenants feel about coming home late at night and not even being allowed to take a shower? I had to go to the USA to be able to experience real freedom, and a large part of that is linked to home ownership.

PAUL GRAF, BRETAGNE, FRANCE

Almost all of us emigrants own a beautiful detached house with a garden and would be completely unhappy back in Switzerland!

Swiss state pension – still a work in progress

SILVIA AMUCHASTEGUI RUDIN, ARGENTINA

Based on my experience of how pensions and retirement schemes work in my country of residence, I believe raising the retirement age is essential. This is the only way to ensure that young people are able to have an adequate pension.

ROLF MÜLLER, PONTEVEDRA, SPAIN

Finally, Switzerland is at least talking about paying out a 13th month of AHV pension. This has long been standard practice in

other EU countries. At the moment, I can still live reasonably well with my pension in Spain – but that’s why I had to leave Switzerland.

WILHELM URS SCHAEERER, SUCINA, SPAIN

In my opinion, the penalties on OASI pensions for couples need to be abolished (abolish the penalties, not the pensions). Today, there are undoubtedly more non-married people living together and who each have access to a full pension!

JEANNETTE SERRE, FRANCE

Pensioners are struggling to get by on their pensions. The reasons are the same in all countries: not enough income because salaries (and therefore the contribution amounts) don’t evolve much, pensioners are living for longer, and the number and amount of fixed costs never stop growing.

The top job – on the Jungfrauoch

HARJEET SINGH OBEROI, PUNJAB, INDIA

I got goosebumps while going through the story. I wish I were there at their place. Something really thrilling, adventurous and truly a place to work at. I seriously wish to experience the same in reality.

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

Link to the SwissCommunity discussion forum: members.swisscommunity.org/forum



We need beauty as far as the eye can see.



Switzerland.



Panorama, Spiez, Region of Bern, © Switzerland Tourism / Andreas Gerth

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