

SWISS REVIEW

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad
December 2021

Priya Ragu from St. Gallen conquers the music world

The Swiss arms trade is booming – disconcertingly
for a country that prides itself on its humanitarianism

A Swiss team has calculated pi to 62.8 trillion decimal
places – but what are the practical benefits?

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“For refugees, starting a new life in a country where you are not necessarily welcome feels almost like a miracle,” says our cover star, Priya Ragu. Priya, who hails from St. Gallen, speaks from experience. She grew up in a Tamil refugee family, but has seen her fortunes turn around dramatically. Priya is now a world-renowned singer (page 14). Her career has taken off like a rocket, and she now belongs on the biggest

stages, winning over hearts not just at festivals like Montreux, but also in the language region where her parents come from. The values she endorses and spreads far and wide in Tamil reflect at the same time a very Swiss sensibility. For example, her best-selling song Kamali discusses the rights and status of women in society and the empowerment of girls to live out their dreams.

Also best-sellers but of a very different kind are Swiss-made weapons. Arms exports are high, and the issue is politically explosive. There is perpetual debate over which countries Swiss guns, munitions, armoured vehicles and other armaments and military equipment should be exported to. After all, arms exports affect Switzerland’s self-perception as a neutral, peaceful country that prefers diplomacy to sabre-rattling. As so often, the reality is more complex than one might at first imagine. For many years, the means to wage war – not cheese and chocolate – were the country’s biggest export. Over three centuries, Swiss mercenary soldiers served on the battlefields of Europe and in colonial armies all around the world. And they were not known for their restraint.

As such, the modern self-image of Switzerland as humanitarian, peace-loving and neutral is the result of consciously implemented changes. Mercenary soldiering has long been prohibited, and exports of military equipment are subject to strict rules. In fact they are now getting even stricter: parliament has tightened up the legislation further in response to public pressure. The government is losing its existing freedom to grant exceptions.

That is welcome, but it does not mean an end to the controversy over arms exports. Ultimately, the question of whether arms exports can ever make the world more peaceful has not been resolved by this legislative tightening.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cover photo: Priya Ragu, Swiss singer with Tamil roots.
Photo: courtesy of Warner Music

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SWI swissinfo.ch

Swiss healthcare on the brink of intensive care



When I was a teenager, I dreamed of being a nurse. That dream never came true, because I realised that I would never have the time to sit by a patient's bedside and listen to them. All I can do, therefore, is support anything that makes this wonderful profession more interesting, more human and therefore better.

RENATA NEUWEILER, CRETE, GREECE

It has long been apparent that these professionals and the work they do cannot be recognised through applause alone; more money is also needed. I will support the healthcare initiative – no ifs or buts. Otherwise, our nurses will soon be sicker than their patients.

PAOLO INDIANO, GERMANY

Placing the entire burden of caring for people onto one profession, one group of people – that is truly sick.

VERÔNICA BÖHME, BRAZIL

Bernard Rappaz, Winkelried of cannabis



It is great to read about personalities in our country – not billionaires, but real personalities. Wherever you are in the world, people who think differently are always penalised. But defiance is necessary for a healthy state; in any case,

that's what Machiavelli said – or maybe he's only for our rulers to read.

FRITZ STINGELIN, MANILA, PHILIPPINES

It's about time! Cannabis should be legal everywhere, it's much less harmful than alcohol and can be extremely beneficial, helping with cancer treatment, anxiety, etc. And the federal and cantonal governments can tax its sale and make tons of money! Legalising cannabis is a win-win for all involved. Conservative lawmakers who want to keep it illegal are trying to control others based on their perceptions of 'morality', not on any objective assessments of health or safety.

VANESSA VELEZ, USA

Even though I am not attracted to this plant, I find this man's actions courageous. What perseverance! And entirely organic, well done!

CLAUDE ROCHAT, FRANCE

Uetendorf, the village so far from the Swiss border



I was delighted to read the article about Uetendorf. My hometown of Rüscheegg-Heubach is not far from Uetendorf, so I particularly enjoyed this article. I have often passed through Uetendorf. America has been my home since 1961, but I will never forget my home country and all the experiences I had there.

HULDA NYDEGGER SHURTLEFF, USA

Filippo Lombardi, the new president of the OSA



Dear Mr Lombardi, may I urge you to act against the increases in PostFinance charges? I have had this account since the year I turned 20, and because I have moved a few hundred kilometres away, I now have to pay 360

francs a year. That makes a big hole in my pension of 1,700 francs per month. Switzerland has become too expensive for me to live in.

LOTTI HUMBEL, HIDEGSEG, HUNGARY

I wish that Mr Lombardi and the Federal Council would talk to the banks to get them not to raise their charges every year or otherwise close accounts. I still have bank accounts in Switzerland in case, for example, there is another coup here in Thailand and I need to leave the country and return to Switzerland. Then at least I would have some money to set myself up with and wouldn't be dependent on the state.

PETER ZURBRÜGG, PHUKET, THAILAND

You can write this in the "Swiss Review" over and over: while only a small minority of members cast a vote, the Council of the Swiss Abroad will never truly constitute the 'Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland'.

SEBASTIAN RENOLD, BOZEN, SOUTH TYROL

It has been years since we in South Africa have been able to vote in Swiss referenda! We don't receive the ballot papers until voting in Switzerland has already closed. We have repeatedly reported this, to no avail. We cannot understand why it would not be possible to send out the documents sooner. Of course, the best option would be electronic voting!

KURT STAUFFER, SOUTH AFRICA

Swiss arms industry on the defensive

Switzerland's arms industry is booming as countries around the world increase their military firepower. But can a neutral country that prides itself on humanitarianism justify exporting arms at all? Pressure from civil society has forced policymakers into action.

THEODORA PETER

The next FIFA World Cup kicks off on 21 November 2022. Hosts Qatar are currently bolstering their military arsenal to protect match venues and sovereign territory. After shopping around for hardware, the oil-rich emirate has commissioned Swiss-based armament manufacturer Rheinmetall Air Defence to supply it with air defence systems worth some 200 million Swiss francs. Cannon technology developed and built in Zurich will be at the Qataris' disposal to shoot down enemy drones and missiles with laser precision. The Federal Council approved the export deal despite many questions surrounding the human rights situation in Qatar, particularly with regard to the exploitation of migrant workers at the World Cup construction sites. In 2019, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) concluded that serious and systematic human rights violations were being committed in Qatar – theoretically a good reason for not exporting military equipment to the country. However, the Federal Council invoked its own escape clause dating back to 2014, which stated that weapons exports could still go ahead if there was a “low risk” of the armaments being used to violate human rights in the recipient country. In other words, the Swiss government believes that air defence cannons are unsuited to the purpose of suppressing your own people.

Weapons in the wrong hands

Arms exports are becoming increasingly contentious within Swiss civil society, especially in the light of repeated high-profile cases in recent years of weapons exported from Switzerland ending up in the wrong hands. For example, Swiss hand grenades originally delivered to the United Arab Emirates in 2003 were found to have been used in the Syrian civil war. Qatar, for its part, illegally passed on Swiss munitions to insurgents in Libya ten years ago. This led to a moratorium on Swiss arms exports at the time. For the critics, these episodes show that arms exports involve many risks, not least in terms of Switzerland's reputation as a guardian of human rights.

In 2018, a broad alliance comprising human rights organisations, relief agencies and political parties launched the “Correction Initiative”, which wanted to include a clause in the constitution banning arms exports to countries that are systematically violating human rights or involved in civil war or any other armed conflicts. The authors of the initiative aimed to stop the Federal Council from caving in to an arms industry pressing for export concessions. They managed to collect well over the necessary 100,000 signatures within just a few months. But no referendum will now take place. Parliament took the hint and has tightened the criteria for arms exports while removing the government's escape clause. The campaigners have therefore withdrawn their initiative because they believe that their demands have been met.

Greater democratic control

The “Correction Initiative” has essentially helped to “keep the Federal Council in check”, admits one of the campaigners, Josef Lang. The former Green National Councilor and co-founder of the Group for a Switzerland without an Army (GSWA) would actually prefer a complete ban on arms exports. However, the Swiss electorate has re-



A highly sought-after Swiss export: the Piranha armoured personnel carrier by Mowag. Photo: Keystone





jected such an idea in the past. A popular initiative to this effect failed in 2009, with an emphatic 68 per cent voting against. The electorate also threw out a proposal over ten years later to ban the funding of arms manufacturers (see edition 5/2020 of “Swiss Review”), with almost 58 per cent voting no at the ballot box at the end of 2020.

Lang nevertheless regards the “Correction Initiative” as a big step in the right direction. “Democratic control will improve, and the Federal Council will find it harder to loosen regulations,” he says. The government can no longer change the criteria on arms exports unilaterally. In future, parliament will be responsible for all relevant decisions.

“Democratic control will improve,
and the Federal Council will find it harder
to loosen export regulations.”

Josef Lang

And the electorate will have the last word, as Lang is keen to stress. “After all, you can contest any law change by forcing a referendum.” Hence, parliament voted against granting the Federal Council special powers. The government wanted to continue wielding its escape clause “in order to safeguard national interests”. This door has been shut – and will remain shut.

Arms manufacturers threaten exodus

Switzerland’s arms manufacturers are not amused. “The implications are enormous,” warns Matthias Zoller, managing director of the Security and Defence Technology working group (ASUW), which represents the interests of arms companies. We will see an exodus of arms manufacturers from Switzerland in the medium term, predicts Zoller. There is notable competition from the European Union, he adds. The EU is investing eight million euros in a scheme to attract arms companies – and “would welcome Swiss firms looking for a new base”. Under the future export regime, Switzerland will no longer be able to export

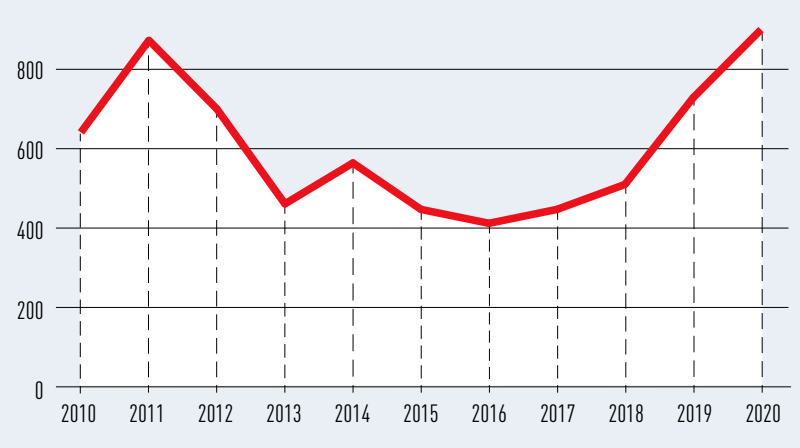
High-precision cannons from Switzerland, such as the Oerlikon Skyshield air defence system, are one of arms manufacturer Rheinmetall’s exports.

Photo: Rheinmetall Air Defence

to countries involved in armed conflict. “And if the rules are followed to the letter as expected, we may no longer be able to deliver arms to the USA, France or Denmark either.” The industry therefore wants the federal government to provide certainty and, as Zoller puts it, “offer clear assurances that we will still be able to export to and cooperate with our international friends”.

The restrictions affect around 200 companies that regularly apply for arms export permits from the federal government. According to government estimates, Switzerland’s security and defence industry employs between 10,000 and 20,000 people (subcontractors included), who also produce military goods that are not used in active combat and therefore cannot be classed as

Development of Swiss armament exports from 2010–2020 in million Swiss francs



Swiss involvement in foreign armies

Switzerland boasts a long history of military expertise. Hundreds of thousands of Swiss went to war for foreign powers until well into the 19th century. It was not until the birth of the modern federal Swiss state that curbs on mercenary activity were introduced.

The Swiss confederacy long wanted to conquer foreign lands. This mindset changed at the Battle of Marignano in 1515, when the Swiss were ousted from the Duchy of Milan and the expansion of the confederacy was stopped. Instead of fighting as soldiers for their homeland, young men were permitted to fight as mercenaries in foreign wars thereafter. Swiss mercenary activity peaked between the 15th and 18th centuries. For a long time, service in foreign armed forces represented Switzerland’s second most important economic sector after agriculture. Swiss officers would recruit farmers, grouping them into regiments to fight for countries including France, Spain, Austria, Savoy, Hungary and the Netherlands. The Swiss Guard continues to serve at the Vatican, where it has been responsible for protecting the Pope since the early 16th century.

Escape from poverty coupled with a lust for adventure

Mercenaries faced increasing curbs on their activity after the federal state was created in 1848. However, the French Foreign Legion continued to recruit tens of thousands of mercenaries. Although Switzerland banned campaigns aimed at recruiting for armed forces such as these in 1859, the hiring of Swiss mercenaries continued to be allowed until the 1920s. Other colonial powers like the Netherlands also relied on Swiss mercenaries. Some 7,600 Swiss mercenaries fought in the Dutch colonial army between 1815 and 1914 in what is now Indonesia, says historian Philipp Krauer, who has been researching the story of these men in the Swiss Tool of Empire project. “Against the prevailing backdrop of mass poverty and emigration,



arms. Take the training aircraft made by Swiss aerospace company Pilatus, for example. Pilatus is free to export these planes to countries including the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, all of whom are involved in the war in Yemen.

The issue of whether Qatar can order more air defence cannons from Switzerland in the future depends on how the Federal Council views the country's human rights situation. At present, the emirate is not involved in armed conflicts such as the one in Yemen. However, Middle East experts say that the rich desert nation in the Persian Gulf is determined to become a regional power. This increases the danger of it becoming embroiled in future conflicts that potentially result in violations of international hu-

manitarian law – the last thing that Switzerland, the depositary state of the Geneva Convention, actually wants.

Swiss arms exports at a record high

Last year, Switzerland exported arms worth some 900 million Swiss francs – 24 per cent more than in the previous year and more than at any other time in recent years (see table). However, arms account for a tiny 0.3 per cent share of Switzerland's total exports. Denmark and Germany were the leading recipients of Swiss arms exports in 2020. Europe accounted for around 60 per cent of exports. The next important market was Asia. Some of the more controversial recipients included Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and Pakistan.



Dressed to kill: the mercenary Gall von Untervalden.
Coloured wood engraving from around 1520–1530.

Photo: Keystone

many politicians were happy to see poorer Swiss choose the cheap way out via the colonial army,” he writes. But besides fleeing from poverty, many mercenaries were also inspired by the notion of adventure. Romantic visions of the tropics quickly gave way to harsh reality. Almost half of the mercenaries in Indonesia died in service. In addition, Swiss soldiers in foreign forces were unable to pursue a military career beyond their mercenary rank. Many regretted their step and turned to their local Swiss consulate in the hope that it could extricate them from their contracts – mostly, however, in vain.

Since 1927, foreign service has been prohibited under the Military Criminal Code. Following the Second World War, an average of 240 mercenaries were convicted each year of joining the French Foreign Legion despite the ban. Nowadays, such cases are few and far between. Switzerland's judiciary came down hard on the 800 or so men who served on the side of the Spanish Republicans against Fran-

co's Nationalists from 1936 to 1939. These activists, who fought for freedom and democracy, received a pardon from parliament 70 years later.

Ban on mercenary firms

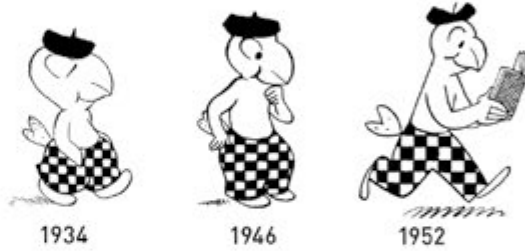
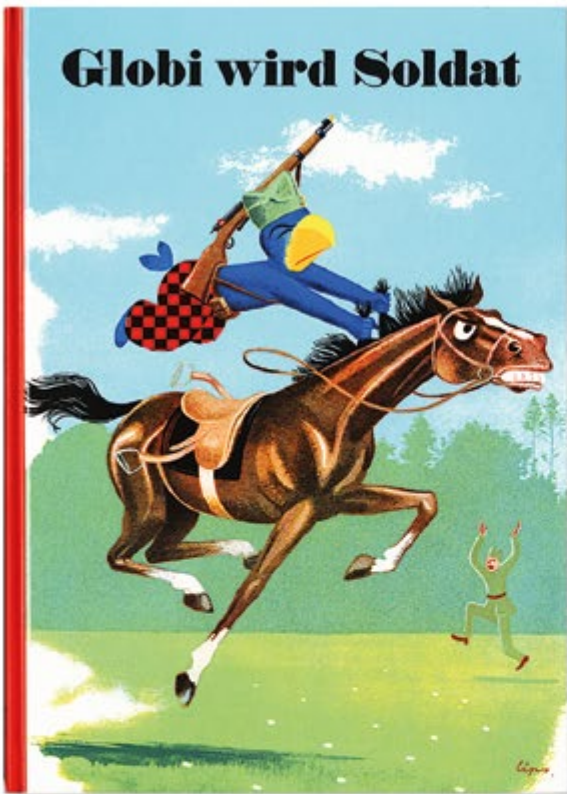
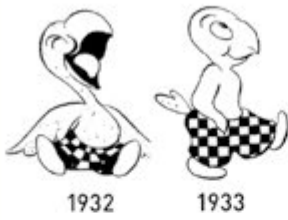
Mercenary firms have been explicitly banned in Switzerland since 2013. It is illegal for Swiss-based private security companies to take part in armed hostilities abroad or recruit mercenaries for this purpose. On introducing the ban, the justice minister at the time Simonetta Sommaruga (SP) stressed that Switzerland was taking responsibility: “We cannot be indifferent to what Swiss-based companies do abroad.”

THEODORA PETER

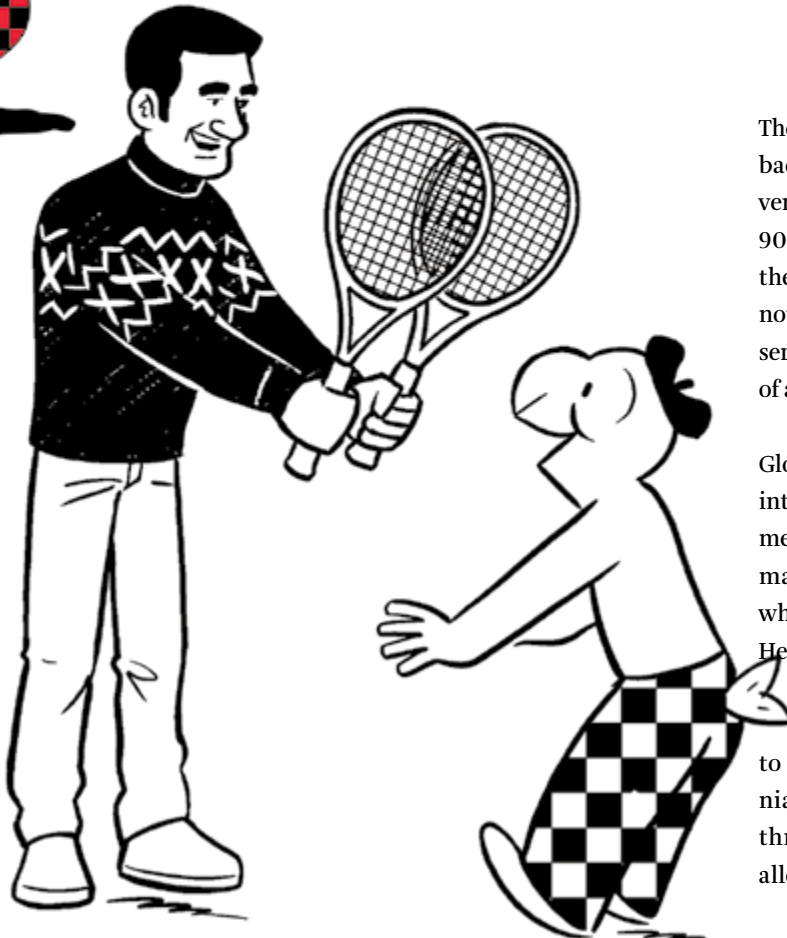
Further information

Swiss soldiers in foreign service (Swiss Federal Archives): [revue.link/soldiers](https://www.revue.link/soldiers)

Swiss mercenaries in Indonesia (Swiss National Museum): [revue.link/mercenaries](https://www.revue.link/mercenaries)



Can Globi save the framework agreement?



The iconic Swiss cartoon character Globi can look back on an illustrious career since being invented by illustrator Robert Lips in 1932 – nearly 90 years ago. Who could have imagined back then that an exotic, ageless blue parrot wearing nothing but a pair of red and black checked trousers and a black beret would become something of a national hero?

This is not what Lips initially had in mind. Globi was born during the economic crisis of the interwar era – a child of expediency for department store Globus, who were looking for a new mascot. The ink on Lip's pen had barely dried when “Globi the soldier” – endorsed by General Henri Guisan no less – found himself championing “geistige Landesverteidigung”, the intellectual defence of the nation. Globi has tried to remain relevant ever since, even if the colonial undercurrent that accompanied his tour through Africa during the early years attracts allegations of racism to this day.

Globi's success is undisputed. The parrot has sold millions of comic books, some of which are now published in English. He has also learned how to cook – Italian cuisine was on the menu this autumn (in “Globi's italienische Küche”). His latest comic book features tennis player Roger Federer.

Federer, a fellow icon, wrote on Instagram that he felt honoured to be reunited with Globi after growing up with the character. Maybe Fed can identify with Globi, given the character's similar temperament and ability to overcome challenges. And talking of challenges – wouldn't it be good if Switzerland could commandeer its favourite parrot for other, more pressing issues? Perhaps Globi could mend the political fallout from the collapse of the Swiss-EU framework agreement. How about “Globi and Europe” as the title of the next book?

JÜRGEN STEINER

www.globi.ch/globi/



1982



1997

A new predator in Switzerland

Switzerland first picked up the trail of the golden jackal ten years ago. We now know that this fox-like predator has taken a particular liking to protected Swiss wetlands. But as jackals start to arrive, other mammal species are being driven out of the country.

MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER

A hunter in the Surselva district of the canton of Grisons pointed his rifle, then pulled the trigger. He thought he had killed a fox, but the dead animal was a male golden jackal.

This incident happened five years ago. The hunter contacted the authorities once he realised his error, said the canton of Grisons when it went public with the news. Golden jackals are a protected species. Technically, it is illegal to kill them. Nevertheless, the accident provided the first-ever concrete, physical evidence of the animal in Switzerland.

From the Balkans to Switzerland

That the Grisons hunter failed to recognise the animal's identity immediately is frankly unsurprising, given that golden jackals have more than a passing resemblance to foxes. They are about the same size as foxes but have shorter tails and longer legs. The colour of their fur ranges from gold to grey.

The long-legged golden jackal is the only jackal subspecies native to Europe. It originally inhabited Asia and the Middle East before moving to the Balkan region during the last century. The extirpation of wolves from the Balkans meant that golden jackals eventually had no natural enemies left and could breed unhindered (wolves dominate jackals).

Hence, jackal numbers are very high in the Balkans. Golden jackals live in family packs. However, young jackals are eventually driven away

and must stake out their own territory in order to start a family. Due to dense jackal populations, it has become hard for these younger members of the species to find fresh hunting grounds. Young males, in particular, are consequently venturing into new areas and covering great distances doing so.

This is why the golden jackal has continued to expand westwards from the Balkans as far as Switzerland. A camera trap took a picture of a golden jackal in Switzerland back in 2011, while a second piece of photographic evidence was captured just before the incident in Grisons.

Switzerland mainly a destination for young males

The images, along with genetic data and reports of jackal sightings, are kept on the computers of the carnivore ecology and wildlife management foundation KORA in Muri (canton of Berne). Based on this documentation, KORA managing director Christian Stauffer says: "Only young, very mobile males have found their way to Switzerland to date." KORA collected seven pieces of photographic or genetic evidence in 2020. There were also some 16 sightings or other traces found.

It is actually astonishing that golden jackals have settled in Switzerland at all, given that their potential habitat in the country is less than ideal. "After all, golden jackals have come from warmer regions and are ill adapted to areas that are covered in snow for long periods," says Stauffer.

Jackal paws are not made for walking in snow either. Their size in proportion to body mass is smaller than that of fox paws, hence they tend to sink into the snow.

Switzerland's high human population density could make it difficult for the golden jackal to find an ideal habitat, says Reinhard Schnidrig, who heads the wildlife conservation section at the Federal Office for the Environment. Nevertheless, even the mountainous and densely populated areas of the country offer spaces in which the animal could well feel at home. Stauffer believes that reed-bed areas are perfect – such as those on the edge of Lake Neuchâtel, where evidence of golden jackals has already been found. Other protected wetland areas such as Kaltbrunner Riet (canton of St. Gallen) have also seen jackal activity. "Switzerland actually has several such areas where I could very well imagine the golden jackal raising offspring one day," says Schnidrig. But the males would have to find a mate first. And this could still take a while, because female golden jackals are yet to arrive. According to Schnidrig, the expansion of mammal populations tends to be male-driven. "The males normally set off first. The females eventually follow."

Is climate change a factor?

Exploding jackal populations in the Balkans are one of the reasons why the species has expanded to Switzerland. Another factor could be climate change and rising temperatures in the



otherwise colder, snowy regions of countries like Switzerland. However, Christian Stauffer believes that the role of climate change in the spread of the golden jackal is unproven. There are no studies to back the theory up either.

Twelve new mammal species in Switzerland

The golden jackal is not the only new mammal in Switzerland. Last spring

Golden jackal sightings are on the rise in Switzerland.

Photo: Keystone

Taller, longer legs, smaller tail: the golden jackal compared to the fox.

Photo: Keystone

saw the biggest-ever survey of mammals in the country. According to the Swiss Society of Wildlife Biology, which conducted the survey, there are now 12 more recorded species in Switzerland than there were 25 years ago. Other than the golden jackal, these include the Valais shrew (*Sorex antinorii*) and a type of bat called the cryptic myotis (*Myotis crypticus*). Previously eradicated species like the wolf and the otter have also returned to Switzerland.

Commenting on its survey, the Swiss Society of Wildlife Biology says that while large species like the golden jackal, the wolf and the ibex attract a great deal of attention, smaller mammals tend to get minimal coverage. Some of these species are coming under increasing pressure. For example, polecat and weasel numbers are falling. And hare habitats are shrinking too. “Hares now have barely any chance of raising their young properly in many places around the country,” says Schnidrig. Species with specific habitat requirements are generally having a hard time in Switzerland, but animals that can handle various conditions are faring well, he concludes. Time will tell how the golden jackal copes in Swiss climes.





Swiss, Tamil and a global star

The Swiss singer of Tamil descent, Priya Ragu, has achieved worldwide success with her single “Good Love 2.0”. The daughter of Sri Lankan refugees, brought up in St. Gallen, her story is one of liberation.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Priya Ragu appears on our computer screen dressed in a grey sweatshirt and sipping a coffee. The musician, aged 35, politely agrees to the interview, organised by the Warner group, with whom she signed in August 2020. The singer has been giving one interview after the other in the context of the release of her first album in September. “Damnshes-tamil” offers ten bright and lively pop songs, crossed with the sounds of South Asia. “When a girl says she’s from Brazil, people find that cool. When I say I’m Tamil, people don’t associate it with anything. It’s not glam!” the rising star tells us, laughing. Priya’s husky yet smooth voice has thrilled listeners, with hundreds of them declaring their love for her on social media. “She mixes the sounds of two completely separate worlds. No one makes music like her,” states one message posted under the music video for the song “Kamali”, which has almost half a million views on YouTube.

A childhood between two worlds

Priya Ragu has already overcome a succession of barriers that render her success all the more impressive. She is female, she is the daughter of refugee parents, she has brown skin, she grew up in a very conservative world and she made her breakthrough at a late age. “I only see the barriers I’ve broken through when I look behind me,” comments the singer from her flat in London. This is the story of a girl born into a family of refugees from Jaffna. They fled the civil war that shook Sri Lanka from 1983 and which ended with the defeat of the Tamil Tigers in 2009. Ragupathylingam, her father, was an accountant. He was also a musician. “He was a well-known singer. But working as a Tamil musician in his country ended up being dangerous,” his daughter tells us. Priya’s mother, Chandrika, taught typing. After a passage through Germany, the family settled in St. Gallen, with their young son, named Roshaan.

The young Priya was to grow up in a stable, but very strict environment. Her father worked for the post office.

Her mother was an assistant in a pharmacy. “It’s a sort of miracle for refugees to be able to start their lives again in a country where they are not necessarily welcome,” remarks Priya, who has Swiss citizenship. At school, she was one of only two girls with brown skin. She experienced some rejection. But for the most part, her integration went well. “I spent so much time crossing between two worlds, I sometimes forgot the colour of my skin.” At home, Tamil music and Kollywood cinema, produced in Tamil Nadu in the south of India, kept alive the culture that her household did not want to forget. Each weekend, the family invited round friends and Priya’s mother would cook. Roshaan would play the organ and Priya and Ragupathylingam would sing. Spoons and buckets were used for percussion. The little band would also play at parties. When asked to talk about her parents’ country, Priya shares memories tainted with sadness. Her links to the island are tenuous, and yet the Tamil culture radiates from her life and thus her music.

A spiritual journey to New York

As an adult, Priya Ragu left the family nest to move to Zurich. Trained in accounting, she was hired by Swiss to sell aircraft components. For years, she flirted with the idea of making music professionally, like her brother, who had already thrown himself heart and soul into the career. In 2017, she left her job and flew to New York. Each morning, Priya would write and meditate. During the last month of her half-year stay, Priya, who had moved to Brooklyn to an apartment with a recording studio lent by the American rapper Oddisee, began to compose. Roshaan, alias Japhna Gold, also had a small recording studio in a shared apartment in Oerlikon. The two musicians exchanged rhythms, melodies and texts online. Japhna suggested incorporating Tamil percussion, and bingo!

Priya returned to Switzerland, where she was rehired by Swiss. Her salary was now used to fund recordings and produce music videos. Ragu music mixing R&B, soul, rap,

Colourful music, colourful clothing: singer Priya Ragu brings different worlds together in a blaze of colour.

Photo: Warner Music



Priya Ragu on the lake stage at this year's Montreux Jazz Festival. Her rapid ascent is opening doors for her everywhere. Photo: Keystone

pop and chants from the Indian subcontinent had arrived in Oerlikon. In 2018, "Leaf High", for which the video would be filmed in Paris, was posted online. "Lighthouse" followed, with a video shot in Mumbai. Priya heard her music on the public radio SRF3, where the two musicians had sent their track. The fourth song to appear online was "Good Love 2.0". The track was pushed in 2020 by Irish DJ Annie Mac, a star of the BBC. The sounds of the St. Gallen singer were heard by "New Musical Express" and "Good Love 2.0" was used to accompany players of the video game FIFA 21. In August 2020, the singer signed with Warner UK. She was interviewed by "The Guardian" and quoted in "The New York Times". A fact worth noting: the ten tracks of "Damnsh-estamil" were almost all recorded in Oerlikon. Ragu's style has something familial and artisan about it.

A discourse on the freedom of women

Priya would like to use her music to break down the stereotypes attached to Sri Lankans, "which essentially limit them to the role of cook, cleaner or seller", she explained to the online journal "Decorated Youth". In "Kamali", a song inspired by a documentary, the artist tells the story of a little girl from Tamil Nadu, brought up by her mother, who supports her passion for skateboarding in a world which does not allow for this possibility. "I want to talk to all the Kamalis in the world, to encourage them to look far ahead of themselves. If we are capable of creating life, imagine what we can create when we break free of our barriers," writes Priya. "My mother, who appears in the track's video, was particularly moved by the life of the mother of Kamali, who had to fight. Her opinion on the place of women in society has changed," explains the singer, who practises Thai boxing. The dream of this Tamil-Swiss citizen, as she sometimes presents herself to preempt questions, is to organise a big music festival in Jaffna one day, with Tamil artists from all over the world.

Food, glorious food

3.3

The hunger pangs arrive, and the fridge beckons. This was a commonplace story throughout 2020, and one with weighty consequences. A study by the University of St. Gallen found that Swiss people put on an average of 3.3 kilogrammes – or as much as 6.7 kilogrammes for those in the 45–64 age bracket.

28,560

It might not be tactful to pursue these calculations further. Nevertheless... if every one of the 8,655,118 people in Switzerland gained 3.3 kilogrammes in a year, how much heavier did the population as a whole become? The answer is 28,560 tonnes. If the Swiss Abroad were equally peckish, that would mean another 2,550 tonnes.

110

Of course, a heavier population is not necessarily a healthier one. The authorities and the food industry are therefore looking for ways to reduce sugar consumption in Switzerland. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends limiting sugar intake to no more than 50 grammes a day. However, daily consumption in Switzerland averages 110 grammes – one of the downsides that comes with the country's love of chocolate.

1

Of course, all of the above cannot be understood without the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to a decrease in movement and poorer nutrition. And the pandemic also resulted in a reduction in life expectancy. Figures from the Federal Statistical Office indicate that male life expectancy fell by around one year to 81 years in 2020. Such a fall is without precedent since 1944. The equivalent figure for women shrank by half a year to just over 85.

87.3

However, life expectancy patterns are not uniform across the country: there are some regions where people live longer than elsewhere. So, where might you want to move to? Answer: Appenzell Innerrhoden, especially if you are female, as the women of this canton have the longest life expectancy (87.3) anywhere in Switzerland.

“Literature cannot rival history”

Novelist Urs Faes digs into his memory.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

Read “Alphabet des Abschieds” (The alphabet of farewells), 1991, and you will notice a remark that epitomises the novel’s author Urs Faes, who was born in Aarau in 1947: “The past is all about telling stories and the archaeology of remembrance.” In “Augenblicke im Paradies” (Moments in paradise), 1994, Faes begins delving into his family history to imbue historical events with real-life experience and personal authenticity. His parents’ corner shop is the inspiration behind this bitter-sweet retrospective of the 1914-50 era. After the fall of the Third Reich, confectioners produced “American” chewing gum instead of German caramel: “The era had ended in ruins, rubble and death. Woe betide any sweet that reminded you of this. *Finis germaniae, finis caramellum, finis sucrum.*”

Art, music, medicine

However, Faes has also shown, in “Ombra” (1997), for example, that he can recount life stories without relying on a family narrative. “Als hätte die Stille Türen” (As if the silence had doors), 2005, juxtaposes the fictional love between two protagonists with the real-life romance between Alban Berg and Hanna Fuchs. “Words are like doors. From silence, into silence. They create expanses in which to move. They create space,” the author writes. The theme of music lends “Als hätte die Stille Türen” an added dimension, while medicine does the same in “Paarbildung” (Coupling), 2010 – a book in which the term “coupling” firstly has oncological implications and, secondly, refers to a moving love affair that recalls the social upheaval of 1968. Born of his experience of undergoing cancer therapy, Faes digs into his personal memory bank again in “Halt auf Verlangen” (Stop on request), 2016, to recount a series of happy and less-than-happy romances. Various life stories feature in “Sommer in Brandenburg” (Summer in Brandenburg), 2014, and “Untertags” (During the day), 2020. The latter is a moving novel that deals with dementia and the role of language. The stories are all mysteriously connected to the summer of 1938 in Germany and the exodus of thousands of young Jews to Palestine.

Back in 1994, the author had the following retort for anyone who thought such an abundance of themes, protagonists and locations was a mere smokescreen for reality: “Even if my books are indeed connected to reality and to history, it is certainly not my intention to depict reality. The most I can do is bring things into relief, because literature cannot rival history. It is no substitute for the real thing, even if it masquerades as such.”

A novella masterpiece

Faes perpetuates the great tradition of the German novella writing in “Raunächte” (The twelve nights of Christmas), 2018. A man trudges through the snowy forest, weighed down by dark memories of a dark secret that drove him away from the place he spent his childhood. This densely packed, skilfully written short story is not only filled with great symbolism, but its tone, atmosphere and rhythm are impeccable too. The author’s nod to Shakespeare’s “Twelfth Night” lends the narrative a mysterious, almost magical depth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: The works of Urs Faes are available from Suhrkamp.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST BASED IN ZÜRICH



“David and Simone looked on silently as the heron waded ever so slowly upstream, gently placing one leg in front of the other into the sandy riverbed, its head nudging forward. Every so often, the bird would stand still for a few seconds, as if seized by the current. It would then exert itself again and continue moving, despite the flow of the river. With tiny steps. The couple stood motionless, watching with bated breath from the riverbank. Then their faces converged.”

From “Als hätte die Stille Türen” (As if the silence had doors); novel; Suhrkamp-Verlag, 2005

circumference and its diameter. We use pi to calculate the size of any circle, large or small. You may even recall its first few digits: 3.1415. But it doesn't end there, because pi is what mathematicians call a transcendental number. In other words, pi is comprised of an infinite number of decimal places.

Pi is a number that never settles into a repeating pattern, says Rölke. Every decimal place must be calculated individually. "This is the unique and fascinating thing." Which is why scholars have been studying pi for some 3,600 years already – from the ancient Egyptians to the Greek mathematicians Archimedes and Ptolemy; from China's Liu Hui to Iran's Jamshīd al-Kāshī and Germany's Leibniz. According to Rölke, there have been mathematicians and physicists who have spent a whole lifetime calculating the odd hundred or so decimal places of pi. The invention of the computer was a game changer, with the advent of electronic mainframe computers at the end of the 1940s extending Pi to 2,037 digits.

Methodology matters

At the end of the 1980s, the Ukrainian-born Chudnovsky brothers developed an algorithm for calculating the digits of pi – which Rölke and his team also employed to hit 62,831,853,071,796 decimal places on their supercomputer. To print out this mind-boggling number, you would have to fill around 17.5 billion A4 sheets of paper on both sides. Enough to take your breath away. And the FHGR scientists got nearer to the true value of pi than anyone else has before. But what is the point of identifying so many digits?

"There is no practical benefit," Rölke confesses cheerfully. Just a few decimal places are sufficient for most purposes. You need a lot more to calculate orbits in space. "But certainly not trillions."

But the world-record number was never meant to be of use per se. The scientists were more interested in the methodology. Their recently purchased supercomputer was an essential tool, but what was also important was having the necessary expertise to set up the hardware properly and ensure that it calculated non-stop over a period of weeks. Hence, the world-record attempt was a way to test the performance of their infrastructure. It also helped to expand their knowledge.

Fit for data-intensive research projects

"In preparing and performing the calculations, we were able to develop significant expertise and optimise our processes," says Rölke. And identify weaknesses such as shortfalls in back-up capacity. It took vast amounts of storage space to conduct such a lengthy pi calculation and record its progress. The scientists repeatedly had to shift the data to commercial external hard drives. As such, the whole process gave them good training for collaborating on data and CPU-intensive projects with partners in research and development.

Together with the Swiss Institute of Allergy and Asthma Research, which is also based in Grisons, they are currently studying the causes of allergies in children – an area in which still very little is known, says Rölke.



Higher, further, faster,
more beautiful?

In search of the somewhat different Swiss records. Today: the "world champions" of pi come from Switzerland.

This wide-ranging project requires extensive calculations for evaluating blood samples, focusing on messenger RNA from genes: "Standard calculations could only take us so far." Intense processing power is necessary for other projects such as climate simulations to predict floods and avalanches. Switzerland's universities of applied sciences are responsible for providing knowledge with a clear practical orientation.

A short-lived record

The pi world record is therefore of genuine scientific benefit, says Rölke. It has been registered with the Guinness Book of Records, but any bragging rights are likely to be short-lived. The mark tends to be broken again after one or two years. And the previous Swiss to extend the record did so only four years ago, when physicist Peter Trüeb calculated the number to 22.4 trillion decimal places in 2017. Google employee Emma Haruka Iwao beat this just two years later, with 31 trillion.

Rölke is relaxed about it. The small matter of publishing the new pi number is proving to be more of a headache for him. He says he would love to make the number freely available, but someone would need to cough up enough storage space for 62 terabytes of data. In uncompressed form, that is one huge slice of pi. "We will probably ask Google for help," he sighs. Our column inches are limited too, so we have decided to publish only the last ten most recently proven decimal places of pi. These are: 7817924264.



Same-sex couples can now marry in Switzerland too

Now that the Swiss electorate has emphatically approved the “Marriage for all” proposal, lobbying for further changes has already begun. These include legalising egg donations and improving the rights of cohabiting partners and single people.

EVELINE RUTZ

Same-sex couples in Switzerland can now marry and adopt children together. They have the same rights as married heterosexual couples. Consequently, their situation has improved with regard to inheritance and naturalisation as well as in numerous other areas. Married lesbian couples can also become parents through sperm donations. Both female partners will be legally recognised as mothers. Their children will be able to learn the identity of the biological father from the age of 18.

A large proportion of the population supports “Marriage for all”, with 64.1 per cent of the electorate having approved the proposal on 26 September. Remarkably, all 26 cantons voted in favour. Even the more conservative cantons voted yes. The Swiss Abroad were very much in agreement, with almost 72 per cent giving their approval.

Wedding bells next summer

Federal Councillor Karin Keller-Sutter expressed her delight at what she called “society giving recognition”. “The state should not tell people how to lead their lives,” she said.

Lara and Delia tie the knot in Regensdorf. A tangible example of society’s new normal.
Photo: Keystone



The relevant amendment to the Swiss Civil Code is scheduled to come into force on 1 July 2022, after which same-sex couples can get married and civil partnerships can be converted to marriage.

The Reformed Church will also conduct same-sex weddings from July next year. However, the church constitution has to be amended first in some cantons, so there could be delays. The result of the referendum will probably have less of an impact within the Catholic Church. Demand for blessing ceremonies, which have already taken place in some parishes, is likely to increase. However, it is hard to imagine the Vatican offering the sacrament of marriage to same-sex couples any time soon.

Difficult ethical and legal questions

Same-sex couples will soon be welcome at registry offices. One particular activist on Twitter said she was looking forward to a bumper wedding season. The LGBTQI movement called it a “milestone on the road towards equality”. Switzerland has been relatively late to approve these changes. It is the 29th country to have taken the step – a decision taken by the Swiss people that goes even further than in other countries by granting female couples access to sperm donations. However, egg donations and surrogacy are still banned. The Centre as well as the centre-right and right-wing parties have no wish to change this. As reasons they cite the difficult ethical and legal questions that the procedures raise. The Social Democrats share their reluctance. However, they are calling for private sperm donations to be allowed. These are more cost-effective and easier to access, says SP co-chair Mattea Meyer.

The Green Liberals want to legalise egg donations. They criticise the way in which current legislation discriminates between sperm and eggs. “The biological father is free to donate his sperm, so it is difficult to see why a separation between the woman who gives her genes and the woman who carries and gives birth to the child is justification enough to prohibit egg donations,” wrote National Councillor Katja Christ in a parliamentary motion.

The political movement Operation Libero wants single women and unmarried couples to benefit from reproductive medicine and be able to adopt children too. The law needs to adapt to modern realities, it says. “Marriage should no longer be considered the default.”

Privileges at the expense of single people

People who are single frequently lose out in Switzerland, says Sylvia Locher, co-chair of Pro Single Switzerland, who believes that society and policymakers make continual concessions to couples and families. “We singles fund everything indirectly without benefiting ourselves.” Undoubtedly, single people are disadvantaged in a number of ways. They pay a higher tax rate compared to married couples. When they die, they are unable to pass on their pension fund assets. Up to 50 per cent of their remaining assets is taxed. “It is high time our situation improved,” says Locher. But she says that few people fight their corner in Berne, unfortunately.

Andrea Caroni shares this view. Families get most of the attention, says the FDP member of the Council of States. “They, the middle classes and the SMEs are the holy cows of



Swiss politics.” Policymakers regularly keep track of how families and couples are faring. But singles are a blind spot. Caroni wants this to change. He is also campaigning for the rights of cohabiting partners and suggests that Switzerland should have the same “civil solidarity pact” that France introduced to give legal status to both heterosexual and same-sex couples. “This would be an easy way for couples to enter into a contractual form of civil union without getting married.”

Tax for married couples

The so-called fiscal marriage penalty is another bone of contention. Under current law, married couples are taxed jointly. This puts dual earners at a disadvantage. Due to progressive taxation, lower-income couples often struggle to make ends meet. A popular initiative is now calling for couples to be taxed individually, regardless of marital status. How sexual minorities are treated is another matter. Transgender and non-binary people are demanding better protection from discrimination. Parliament has already decided that citizens should be able to change their official gender relatively easily in the future. It will soon address the issue of whether to introduce a third gender.

The electorate emphatically rejected the Young Socialists’ “99 per cent initiative” on 26 September, with 65 per cent voting against an increase in capital income tax. All the cantons said no. The “Fifth Switzerland” also rejected the initiative, but only narrowly (51 per cent).

The organising committee in celebration mode following the resounding victory of the “Marriage for all” campaign.

Photo: Keystone

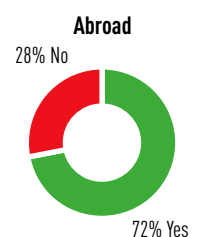
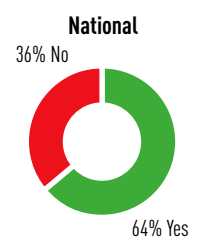
The votes of 13 February 2022

Tobacco advertising: Health organisations have submitted the “Yes to protecting children and young people from tobacco advertising” initiative, which calls for a ban on all forms of tobacco advertising. Currently, tobacco advertising is only banned on the radio and television. Opponents fear that such a ban would limit economic freedom.

Animal testing: A citizen’s group has submitted the “Yes to a ban on animal and human testing” initiative, which calls for a radical change in current pharmaceutical testing practices. This initiative goes too far for the Federal Council and parliament, which warn of the negative impact on drug supply.

Taxation: Parliament has voted to abolish issuance stamp duty on equity capital, with the federal government set to lose revenue worth 250 million francs a year as a result. The SP, the Greens, and trade unions call this a “tax break” for companies and equity owners, and have called a referendum to oppose it.

Media subsidies: The federal government intends to subsidise Switzerland’s ailing media sector with an additional 120 million francs over the next few years. A centre-right and right-wing committee has called a referendum to oppose these “damaging subsidies”, which it fears will result in a “state-funded media” that compromises independent journalism.



The “Fifth Switzerland” came out particularly strongly in favour of “Marriage for all” with a 72 per cent majority.

A paradoxical love affair

People in Switzerland are paying with cash less and less but stashing away more and more banknotes and coins. Will cash payments one day be a thing of the past? No, says a pressure group campaigning for a popular initiative on the matter.

JÜRIG STEINER

“A fool and his money are soon parted” is a proverb with which many of us can identify. The Swiss – irrespective of wealth – have an intimate, not to say reverential relationship with their hard-earned banknotes and coins. Remember putting away those 5, 10, 20 and 50-centime coins into an empty jam jar when you were young, pouring out the contents once a year to spend on a little something extra?

Occasionally, this turns into a lifelong obsession for people who, for example, like to collect a particular coin from every year it was issued.

Legal tender since 1879

Lately, Swiss numismatics enthusiasts have been dealing in superlatives. According to the federal mint Swissmint, the ten-centime piece minted in 1879 is the “oldest unaltered coin still in circulation” – a fact authenticated by the publishers of the Guinness Book of World Records no less. The ten-centime coin, which depicts the head of Libertas, the Roman goddess of liberty, has remained unchanged for over 140 years. Even pieces minted in 1879 can still be used as legal tender.

Nevertheless, the emotional attachment that many Swiss have to the coins and banknotes of their national currency seems almost quaint these days, given that they are losing the habit of paying by cash.

Will cash soon be obsolete?

In its recent survey on payment methods, the Swiss National Bank (SNB) discovered that a watershed has been

reached with regard to payment behaviour. In terms of the transaction value of non-recurring payments, the debit card has replaced cash in Switzerland as the most important payment instrument. Cash is now only the most widely used payment method for amounts up to 20 Swiss francs. Otherwise, the bulk of payments are settled by card.

According to the SNB, two factors have accelerated the trend towards cashless payments. Firstly, contactless payment is a technological development that has made paying by card even simpler than handing over cash at the till. Coins falling out of wallets and purses are a thing of the past. Secondly, the Covid-19 pandemic has seen many businesses actively urging their cus-



What to do with your old banknotes

I recently heard that “old” Swiss banknotes will no longer be legal tender from this autumn. How can I avoid losing my money, or is there nothing I can do about this?

tomers to make cashless payments. The general public has followed their advice and, according to the SNB survey, not looked back since.

Will banknotes and coins become obsolete? Or could cash even be abolished for good and become the exclusive realm of enthusiastic collectors? For years, the former chief economist of the International Monetary Fund, Kenneth Rogoff, has been advocating what he calls a “less-cash society”. He believes that limiting the circulation of cash would not only allow governments to combat financial crimes such as tax evasion and the funding of terrorism and drug use more effectively, but it would also make it easier for them to enforce negative interest rates.

The cash comeback

However, Switzerland is seeing a different trend which illustrates the nation’s paradoxical love affair with physical money. Although the Swiss are using less cash, the amount of Swiss franc notes in circulation is rising. “Banknote circulation has been increasing steadily for many years,” says SNB spokesman Christoph Hirter. “People also generally tend to hoard more cash during crises.” As far as the Swiss franc is concerned, the cash curve has been climbing since around the time of the 2008 financial crisis and, according to Hirter, continued upwards in the Covid year of 2020.

The SNB keeps an exact account of how many banknotes of each denomination are in circulation. The corresponding value of these notes is currently 84.5 billion francs, of

which over half consists of about 48 million 1,000-franc notes. If this money was shared equally, every Swiss man, woman and child would have 10,000 francs in cash, including six 1,000-franc banknotes. So, how come the majority of those questioned in the SNB survey said they kept less than 1,000 francs in cash?

Cash for freedom

“Your calculation fails to take account of the proportion of Swiss cash in circulation that is located abroad,” Hirter points out. There are undoubtedly psychological and ideological factors in play too. Take the Swiss Freedom Movement for example. The pressure group is currently collecting signatures for a popular initiative to preserve cash. The rise in cashless payments and the inevitable digital footprint that this creates provide greater scope for snooping and make it easier for the state to violate people’s privacy, laments the former SVP party secretary in Lucerne, Richard Koller, who chairs the group. “Cash is freedom, independence, and part of our culture,” he says. And too precious to give away.

Whether you share his view or not, cash in Switzerland is imbued with an aura and mystique that easily outstrips its nominal value. From the ten-centime coin to the 1,000-franc note.

The Swiss National Bank (SNB) recalled its eighth-series banknotes as of 30 April 2021. As a result, these notes are no longer regular tender. And the interim period during which these old banknotes were still accepted as tender at the public counters of Swiss Post and Swiss Federal Railways (SBB) expired at the end of October. However, the banknotes can be exchanged for an unlimited period at the SNB in Berne or Zurich or at any one of the SNB agencies in Appenzell, Chur, Fribourg, Geneva, Glarus, Liestal, Lucerne, Sarnen, Schaffhausen, Schwyz, Sion, Stans and Zug. Please note that certain agencies have limits with regard to such exchanges. Visit the SNB website – www.snb.ch – for further information. An instruction sheet containing everything you need to know about exchanging banknotes is also available at revue.link/banknotes.

OSA LEGAL SERVICE



Although these notes are no longer legal tender, they may be exchanged at the Swiss National Bank and its agencies. Photo: Keystone

Covid's political side-effects

The Covid-19 pandemic is posing challenges for the Swiss party system. An emerging movement without a clear political allegiance going by the name Friends of the Constitution suddenly has the power to force popular votes. That is giving the SVP in particular food for thought.

JÜRIG STEINER

The ringing of bells seems to crop up regularly in local politics in Switzerland, for instance when people complain that the sound of church or cow bells is disturbing their rest. For some months now, however, people wearing bells have been causing disruption on an unprecedented scale. “Treichel” are large, loud bells found mainly in central Switzerland, where they are normally an apolitical accompaniment to customs such as Fasnacht carnival celebrations.



Unmistakeable and divisive bells in a politically charged environment: Freiheitstrychler at a protest against Covid measures.

Photo: Keystone

A group has now emerged from this varied Treichler culture calling itself by the dialect name “Freiheitstrychler” (“Bell-ringers for Freedom”). Clad in white T-shirts with traditional designs, these bell ringers from deepest Switzerland can be found marching in formation at the regular demonstrations against government anti-Covid restrictions. The newly politicised Treichler effectively provide the soundtrack to the growing resistance to the national government’s coronavirus policy, which saw tens of thousands of people protesting at a demonstration in Berne in mid-October.

However, the quaint sound of the stolid Treichler downplays the political momentum that is gathering here. The Friends of the Constitution (Freunde der Verfassung) group, which opposes the anti-Covid measures, has quickly mushroomed to well over 10,000 members and been labelled a “major new force in direct democracy” by the “Neue Zürcher

Zeitung” newspaper. This is borne out by the fact that it took the organisation – which is not affiliated with any political party – barely three weeks in summer 2021 to secure 190,000 signatures calling for a referendum, and thus to force a fresh popular vote on the further tightening of national Covid legislation.

At the time of printing, three weeks before the vote on the Covid legislation, pollsters were expecting that the majority of the population would back the federal government’s Covid measures, even though Switzerland still has one of the lowest vaccination rates in western Europe, at around 60%.

However, even if the Friends of the Constitution are defeated at the ballot box, the party-political system has been shaken by the group’s recent surge in popularity among right-wingers who believe that the Covid crisis has been used as a pretext for bringing in a freedom-robbing surveillance state. This has been compounded by support from the left, where some people regard Covid measures as an infringement of human rights.

The political geographer Michael Hermann, whose Sotomo research institute has conducted multiple opinion polls on the subject of the coronavirus crisis, stresses that the Friends of the Constitution is attracting a broad spectrum of people from both the right and the left of the SVP. However, the success of this unpredictable movement has also forced the right-wing nationalist SVP to react swiftly: leading figures such as Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer and party pioneer Christoph Blocher have appeared in the media wearing Freiheitstrychler T-shirts, as a nod to protesters against the measures.

This highlights what Michael Hermann has long predicted: the controversy over the Covid measures has suddenly repoliticised critics of the state on the right wing, giving the SVP an unexpected boost, after it had weakened following the 2019 elections. Hermann’s Sotomo institute also carried out a mid-term electoral barometer study in autumn 2021, which showed a trend towards the SVP clawing back its losses. It is well ahead of the SP, with the FDP, Die Mitte (The Centre) and the Greens locked in fierce battle for third place in Switzerland’s political hierarchy. That is unless Covid ramps up the stress on political parties even further.

Apprenticeship or university? Or even both?

Swiss Abroad can also benefit from the excellent and diverse range of educational opportunities available in Switzerland.

In Switzerland, it is also possible to study at university after completing an apprenticeship. Unlike in many other countries, the education system in Switzerland is characterised by a high degree of flexibility. Anyone who has the necessary qualifications can, in principle, complete the training of their choice. The educational pathways can therefore be very varied.

Around two thirds of all young people choose the path of a vocational apprenticeship after completing compulsory schooling. Some of them complete the apprenticeship with a vocational baccalaureate, which opens direct access to a university of applied sciences at university level. With a further year of schooling, the so-called Passerelle, it is also possible to study at a “traditional” university.

One third of young people continue to attend a general education school such as a Gymnasium after completing compulsory education. The Swiss “maturity certificate” provides direct access to one of the 10 Swiss universities or to the federal institutes of technology (ETH Zurich, EPFL Lausanne). Holders of a maturity can also complete a vocational apprenticeship or study at a university of applied sciences with a one-year internship.

Apprenticeship

Three- to four-year vocational apprenticeships are available in over 250 professions. During an apprenticeship, apprentices receive a modest

wage. Three days a week they usually work in the training company and two days they attend vocational school. However, there are also full-time vocational schools.

Universities studies

In Switzerland, there are three types of higher education institutions offering Bachelor’s and Master’s studies:

- Universities of applied sciences offer practice-oriented programmes, as well as art and music faculties. With a Bachelor’s degree, entry into the working world is usually smooth.
- Universities and institutes of technology offer courses in law, economics, mathematics, natural science, humanities, and social science. The Federal Institutes of Technology (ETHZ and EPFL) focus on engineering, mathematics, and natural science.
- Universities of teacher education provide teacher training at all school levels.

Information and contact details

The team at [educationsuisse](http://educationsuisse.ch) speak English, German, French, Italian and Spanish. They can help you find the correct answers to your questions and give support on specific matters. For further information or queries, email info@educationsuisse.ch or call +41 (0)31 356 61 04. (RG)



Paper prices at a record high

There is a paper shortage in Switzerland, as in the rest of Europe. Paper prices are soaring as a result. This is having a serious impact on newspapers and magazines, including “Swiss Review”. In view of this, please note again that readers can pay a voluntary subscription to help fund the print edition of “Swiss Review”. Your support expressed in this way will help us to offer the “Review” on paper in the same quality for many years to come. The bank details for the transfer of voluntary subscriptions are as follows (please note: cheques cannot be cashed):

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

Summer holiday camps for children aged 8 to 14

Swiss children living abroad will have an opportunity to get to know Switzerland and its culture – and have a great time with around 40 other children from around the world – at a series of two-week summer holiday camps from the end of June to the end of August 2022. Registration for these camps begins on 10 January 2022.

The camp dates are:

Saturday 25 June – Friday 8 July 2022

Saturday 9 July – Friday 22 July 2022

Saturday 23 July – Friday 5 August 2022

Saturday 6 August – Friday 19 August 2022

Further details on the various offers (locations, age groups, etc.) will be available online from mid-December 2021 at www.sjas.ch. The registration deadline is 15 March 2022.

The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) wants to give all Swiss children living abroad the chance to get to know Switzerland in this way at least once. We therefore offer price reductions whenever these are justified. The relevant fee reduction application form is available for completion when you sign up to a camp. For further details, please do not hesitate to contact the FYSA.

(LR)

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA)

Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland

Tel.: +41 31 356 61 16

Email: info@sjas.ch / www.sjas.ch/en



Youth offers in 2022 for young people from the age of 15



Next summer and next winter, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) will be organising holiday camps as well as online offers for young Swiss Abroad aged 15 or older. For further information, visit revue.link/youthoffers.

Our holiday camps at a glance

09.07. – 22.07.2022 Sport and leisure camp in Fiesch (canton of Valais)

23.07. – 05.08.2022 Sport and leisure camp (with or without a language course) in Jaun (canton of Fribourg)

06.08. – 21.08.2022 Swiss Challenge

28.12. – 06.01.2023 New Year's ski camp

Our online offers:

14.03. – 25.03.2022 Online German and French course

11.07. – 22.07.2022 Online German and French course

13. 07.2022 2nd Congress of Young Swiss Abroad, to be held online in collaboration with the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad (YPSA)

We will also be happy to post you our information brochure including the schedule of events on request. You can sign up to our youth offers from 10 January 2022. The registration deadline is 15 March 2022.

We will naturally keep an eye on the pandemic. The health and safety of participants and camp organisers is our highest priority, and we will put in place all necessary and appropriate precautions in good time.

For further details, please do not hesitate to contact the Youth Service:

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad,

Youth Service, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland

telephone +41 31 356 61 24, email: youth@swisscommunity.org

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



Help in entering the Swiss job market

When Swiss Abroad return to Switzerland, it often means they are also looking for a job. Finding one is not always easy. However, there is an office in Basel dedicated to assisting them.

Around ten years ago, the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) set up an advisory service for Swiss Abroad who wanted to return and work in Switzerland. The Recruitment Act formed the basis for this measure. In July 2019, SECO transferred its advisory and employment services to the Office of Economy and Labour of the canton of Basel-Stadt (AWA BS). AWA BS is now entrusted with providing Swiss job seekers from abroad with the best possible support in preparing for reintegration into the Swiss employment market. Ideally, assistance from AWA BS will help them find jobs before they return to Switzerland, or at least point them in the right direction. AWA BS is geared to providing practical guidance and advice tailored to each individual.

In greater demand due to the pandemic

People of employable age represent the AWA BS target group – totalling just over 442,000, or 57 per cent of all Swiss Abroad, in 2020. An average of 100 people returning to Switzerland contact AWA BS every year. The office in Basel received a record number of enquiries in 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, with massive job losses and a decline in economic activity around the world suddenly causing many Swiss to return home.

Besides searching for a job, many returnees also applied for financial and material assistance. They received advice and support during this difficult period, thanks to effective cooperation between AWA BS, SECO and the FDFA.

Practical information

AWA BS is no recruitment agency, but it provides practical information about the job market and terms of employment in Switzerland as well as putting Swiss returnees in touch with potential employers and recruitment companies. It also offers tips on preparing job applications (CVs, cover letters).

Last year, AWA BS received 254 enquiries from Swiss Abroad, with 98 people subsequently registering with the office and 156 people obtaining assistance without signing



up. Those who sign up can access job vacancies in Switzerland via the online public employment information system job-room.ch.

Enquiries from around the world

AWA BS receives enquiries from all corners of the world. Most of these in 2020 came from Swiss Abroad in Europe (42 per cent) – followed by Latin America (17 per cent), Asia (16 per cent), Africa (12 per cent), North America (10 per cent) and Oceania (3 per cent).

LAURENT HODIO

Laurent Hodio

Swiss Abroad Advisor

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Hochstrasse 37, P.O. Box , CH-4002 Basel

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www.awa.bs.ch, www.ec.europa.eu/eures

There are many good jobs available on the Swiss labour market, but it's not always easy for returnees to find a foothold.

Photo: iStock

Solidarity payment for victims of compulsory social measures

Thanks to a legal amendment, it is still possible to apply for a solidarity contribution.

Victims of compulsory social measures and placements in Switzerland before 1981 are entitled to a “solidarity contribution” – a payment intended as Switzerland’s acknowledgement of the injustice that they suffered. Applications for this payment are open to those who suffered or were mistreated as children or young adults after being placed in administrative care, e.g. indentured by the authorities to farms as a cheap source of labour, or placed in children’s homes. The same applies to victims of forced abortions, adoptions, sterilisation procedures, and castration, as well as those who were used as subjects in medical trials against their will (see article in edition 4/2018 of “Swiss Review”).

Some 10,300 applications have already

been submitted to the Federal Office of Justice so far, of which around 500 originate from people domiciled abroad. About 96 per cent have been approved and the solidarity contribution paid out.

The Federal Act on Compulsory Social Measures and Placements (CSMP) originally stipulated that applications for the solidarity contribution be submitted no later than the end of March 2018. A variety of factors meant that many people were unable to submit their applications before this deadline. Parliament therefore decided to amend the act by lifting the deadline. The revised act came into force on 1 November 2020. Consequently, anyone who has not yet submitted their application can now do so at any time.

To facilitate the application procedure, the Federal Office of Justice has put together a download page containing the application form (including relevant instructions), which can be printed out or filled out electronically: revue.link/solidarity.

Anyone who needs additional help in submitting their application or locating records is invited to contact the relevant cantonal victim centre or cantonal archive. A file containing a list of addresses is also available to download on the aforementioned website. The support that these insti-



tutions provide is free of charge and can also be accessed by people domiciled abroad. The Federal Office of Justice’s CSMP Unit can additionally be contacted for further information (+41 58 462 42 84 or sekretariat@fuer-sorgerischezwangsmassnahmen.ch).

FOJ, CSMP UNIT

Contract children and victims of enforced protective measures protest in front of the Federal Palace in Bern with photos bearing witness to their stolen youth (2014). Photo: Keystone



Contract children, seen here in Wattenwil (Berne, 1954), were often exploited as cheap labour.

Photo: Keystone

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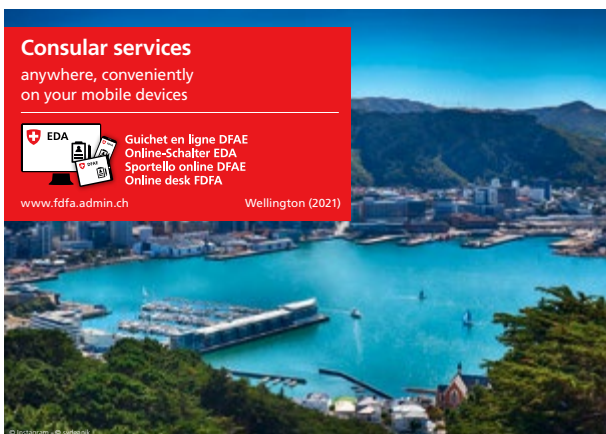
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Responsible for the FDFA official communications:
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 Effingerstrasse 27, 3003 Berne, Switzerland
www.eda.admin.ch, email: kdip@eda.admin.ch

Federal votes

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

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

The Federal Council decided that there will be four federal proposals submitted to the people on 13 February 2022:

- Federal Popular Initiative 'Yes to a ban on experiments on animals and humans – Yes to safe research that brings progress'
- Federal Popular Initiative 'Yes to protecting children and young adults against tobacco advertising (No tobacco ads for children and young adults)'
- Amendment of 18 June 2021 to the Federal Act on Stamp Duties (StA)
- Federal Act of 18 June 2021 on a Media Support Package

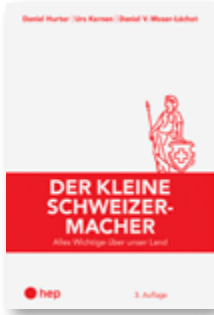
Popular initiatives

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 an independent and free Swiss currency with coins or banknotes (Cash is freedom)" (17.02.2023)
- Federal Popular Initiative "For a responsible economy within our planet's limits (Environmental Responsibility Initiative)" (24.02.2023)
- Federal Popular Initiative "Against the F-35 (Stop the F-35)" (01.03.2023)
- Federal Popular Initiative "Yes to fair and secure pensions (Generations Initiative)" (07.03.2023)
- Federal Popular Initiative "Living in dignity – For an unconditional basic income" (21.03.2023)

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

A guide to Switzerland



DANIEL HURTER,
URS KERNEN,
DANIEL V. MOSER-LÉCHOT
Der kleine Schweizermacher.
hep Verlag, Berne.
2021. Third edition. 170
pages. CHF 29.
Only available in German

The content is concise and, for the most part, unsurprising – which is probably why reading it has a deeply calming effect. No word is wasted in any of the short, dry, assiduously proofread sentences that the authors use to condense the essence of Switzerland into 170 pages. Still, the book even manages to devote a few lines (on page 151) to the Covid-19 pandemic and the contentious role of the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH).

“Der kleine Schweizermacher” (Guide to Switzerland) – embellished with the sub-heading “Alles Wichtige über unser Land” (Everything you need to know about our country) – has an ominous tone when you consider that Swiss director Rolf Lyssy criticised Swiss immigration policy in his similarly

titled 1978 film “Die Schweizermacher”. The book – now in its third edition – basically turns things around by presenting to Swiss readers the material that they would be advised to study if they had to take a citizenship test themselves.

Most people would be familiar with the book’s contents. Nevertheless, imagine if there was a referendum and your daughter, just turned 18, was about to vote for the first time. You would be glad to have this straightforward guide to help you answer her questions. Finding the right words to explain the many facets of Switzerland to your loved ones is often far from easy. And yes – when reading the book, you get a good idea of what it really takes to pass a citizenship test.

Some slightly outmoded gaps in information cannot be ignored. For example, the entry on literature mentions four men – Francesco Chiesa, Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürrenmatt – but no one else.

However, entries such as the one on insurance are most insightful. The three authors refer to a “mentality of wanting to protect yourself against all risks in life”. That is why the Swiss like to “take out insurance policies that make little sense or are already covered by other policies”. The authors’ verdict on church bells is just as pithy: “While many love this tradition, some consider church bells a noisy nuisance.” Switzerland in a nutshell – for both Swiss and non-Swiss.

JÜRIG STEINER

Improvised modules



NIK BÄRTSCH:
“Entendre”.
ECM, 2021

Nik Bärtsch – the inspiration behind combos Ronin and Mobile – has long been one of the linchpins of the European jazz scene. However, “Entendre” marks an important step in the Zurich artist’s career. It is Bärtsch’s first-ever solo album after a series of 12 previous recordings. It also represents his first collaboration with iconic German record label ECM. In the 1970s, ECM began championing the pioneering, ethereal soundscapes that have transformed the genre of jazz. Keith Jarrett’s legendary “The Köln Concert” was released by ECM, as were albums by Jan Garbarek, Ralph Towner and Eberhard Weber.

The fact that ECM has released “Entendre” is a compliment to Bärtsch, whose music fits perfectly into the label’s portfolio. His is a

brand of jazz that breathes and flows. That fills time and space, unfurling a mantra-like intensity. Recorded in the rounded acoustics of the Stelio Molo auditorium in Lugano, the album consists of six tracks, five of which the 50-year-old musician refers to as “modules”. The sixth piece is called “Déjà-vu, Vienna”. Bärtsch prefers to work to set pieces and cues, building on these repetitively instead of following composed arrangements – full of hypnotic and groovy rhythms, imbued with both a clear structure and a free spirit. Controlled and ecstatic at once, with generous scope for improvisation.

“My music shows a close affinity with architectural spaces, following the principles of repetition and reduction as well as intertwining rhythms,” he says. “Listening to music can be like exploring a room in a house.” A deep statement that belies the immediacy and intuitiveness of Bärtsch’s music.

“Entendre” also exudes a somewhat mystical energy in its trance-like quality, as do so many of the pianist’s other works. Wearing black and resembling a Zen monk with his shaven head and thin strip of beard, Bärtsch visually underscores this impression every time he walks on stage. This translates into a coherent whole. ECM’s involvement makes perfect sense and is fully deserved.

MARKO LEHTINEN

Heinz Frei



Parasports receive less media attention than so called able-bodied sports. And Heinz Frei is less well-known than, say, tennis player Belinda Bencic, gold medal winner in the Tokyo Olympic Games. And yet, Frei's story is incredible! On 1 September, at the Paralympic Games, the 63-year-old athlete from Berne won the silver medal in road handcycling. He cycled 78 km in the driving rain using just the strength of his arms. This was the 16th time he has participated in the Paralympic Games, in which he has won a haul of 16 gold medals in athletics, handcycling and cross-country skiing. Superhuman!

This exceptional sporting tale began with an accident. The year was 1978 and the young Heinz was running in the mountains. He fell and broke his spine at his ribcage. The result was paraplegia. "Am I going to manage? Is life in a wheelchair worth living?" Heinz Frei asked himself. Then, two years later, he returned to sports with a modified wheelchair. The idea of limitations has underpinned his journey. "It is important to have realistic objectives that lead step by step to success, and that allow you to achieve what is possible, rather than aiming for a utopia which will always remain a fantasy. This means accepting deep down that there are limits," he explains on the website of a Swiss stairlift manufacturer.

In Tokyo, on the Fuji International Speedway, Heinz Frei took risks and succeeded in winning the silver medal, which he describes as his gold medal. "Today, the real winner is my body," he states. After his accident, the sportsman had to refamiliarise himself with this new body, "until it became [his] friend". Mission accomplished.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Women's session calls for more equality

It was women only in the Federal Palace during the last weekend in October, when the second women's session (the first was in 1991) was held to establish the political position of women in Switzerland. The main demands were greater equality and equal pay, the eradication of old-age poverty among women, the creation of a federal office for equality and family, and the establishment of a research programme for gender medicine. The women's session produced a total of 23 petitions, which now go to the National Council and Council of States for approval. (MUL)

Switzerland approves second cohesion contribution

At the end of September, the Swiss Parliament approved a second cohesion contribution, totalling 1.3 billion Swiss francs. The funds are to support development in new and economically disadvantaged EU member states. The contribution is in return for the benefits Switzerland gains by having access to these markets. Given the current tension between Berne and Brussels, parliament initially wanted to make the funds contingent on certain conditions, but ultimately decided against it. (MUL)

Australia opens embassy in Switzerland

After a gap of 30 years, Australia is once again opening an embassy in Switzerland. This is somewhat unusual, as many countries have closed or merged embassies in recent years. Australia emphasises that the new embassy will strengthen the political, economic, strategic, cultural and scientific ties that bind the two countries together. (MUL)

Criticism of the use of force in asylum centres

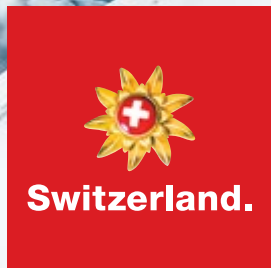
An investigation has concluded that security staff have used "disproportionate force" on a number of occasions in federal asylum centres. However, according to former Supreme Court judge Niklaus Oberholzer, who led the investigation, the documented instances of disproportionate and unlawful conduct do not constitute a systematic failure to respect the rights of asylum seekers in federal centres. (MUL)

New minimum tax rate "feasible" for Switzerland

Switzerland is not happy about the large industrialised nations' plan to apply a global minimum corporate tax rate of 15 percent. The reform would affect 18 Swiss cantons in particular, where corporate income tax is below 15 percent. Nevertheless, following some initial scepticism, Finance Minister Ueli Maurer does not envisage "any major problems". The new tax regime is considered "feasible" for Switzerland, although some companies will inevitably have to pay more tax in future. (MUL)

I need alpine air.

Verbier, Valais, © Grant Gunderson



I need Switzerland.

Discover Winter now: [MySwitzerland.com/winter](https://www.myswitzerland.com/winter)
Share your best experiences using [#INeedSwitzerland](https://twitter.com/INeedSwitzerland)

