

# SWISS REVIEW

The magazine for the Swiss Abroad  
September 2020

**Switzerland's colonial leaders  
are left out in the rain**

**5G – How the new wireless standard  
has ignited a debate in Switzerland**

**La Brévine – “Switzerland's Siberia”  
lives up to its billing even in summer**





*"I have fought all my life against injustice and for the rule of law. That's why I support the Responsible Business Initiative."*

**Dick Marty**  
former member of the Council of States (FDP)  
and co-president of the Initiative Committee



In the Peruvian city of Cerro de Pasco, air and water are poisoned with lead, arsenic and other heavy metals. A huge mine controlled by Glencore is responsible for this. Especially for children the lead poisoning has dramatic consequences: Anemia, disability, paralysis.

**The initiative's demand is self-evident: If corporations pollute rivers or destroy whole areas, they must be held responsible.**

[www.corporatejustice.ch](http://www.corporatejustice.ch)

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Initiative**

**on 29 November**

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The guide of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad offers you some valuable information on inheritance planning.

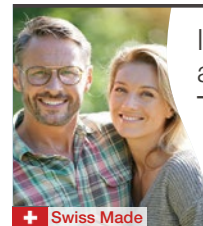


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**The Corporate Responsibility Initiative  
would increase the poverty of African  
farmers. And I cannot allow this to  
happen.**

Isabelle Chevalley  
National Councillor GLP Vaud

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**NO**

**to the Corporate  
Responsibility Initiative**

# When David was Goliath

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Admittedly, the bronze statue depicting the gentleman on the cover of this magazine is hard to recognise amid the cold spray of a high-pressure water hose. The emergency clean-up was necessary after demonstrators in Neuchâtel smeared the statue with blood-red paint. However, David de Pury (1709–86) – the man on the plinth – will never quite regain his former lustre. De Pury bequeathed his home city of Neuchâ-

tel an immense amount of wealth after making a massive fortune with his business ventures abroad. He was a financial Goliath, hence the statue. However, since the public have become aware that de Pury made much of his wealth through the slave trade, the city’s relationship with its favourite son has cooled noticeably. Cue the paint bombs.

De Pury was one of a group of entrepreneurs who, for a while, helped Switzerland to enjoy the spoils of ‘colonialism without colonies’. This is old news if truth be told, yet the global Black Lives Matter movement has brought this chapter in Swiss history into sharp relief, as we will explain later in this issue (page 20).

Switzerland’s image takes yet another beating, I hear you cry. But this is good medicine. Any society that can recognise past mistakes without being crushed is a progressive society. And for a modern-day Switzerland that prizes and thrives on the virtues of balance and compromise, being reminded of the errors and blood-spilling of bygone days ought to be a salutary experience.

De Pury and his peers also remind us that we were never an island in the first place. “Switzerland’s story has always been about more than what happens in Switzerland and in Europe alone,” says historian Bernhard C. Schär. Switzerland belongs to the global village, in good times and bad – as the Swiss Abroad know only too well.

The Responsible Business Initiative, due to be put to the electorate on 29 November 2020 (see page 13), proves how relevant the global village continues to be. Should Swiss companies be liable for human rights or environmental violations that they cause in other countries?

This voting question is not much different to the issue of whether David de Pury earned his fortune in a morally defensible manner. But, unlike de Pury back then, today’s multinationals are under the close scrutiny of civil society.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cover photo:

The statue of Neuchâtel slave trader David de Pury is cleaned following a paint attack. Photo: Keystone

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



## Dear Swiss Abroad,

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) has a small but important favour to ask. Please ensure that your local Swiss representation has your current personal email address. Many Swiss expatriates have not yet provided their Swiss representation with an email address, while many of the email addresses registered with Swiss representations are no longer used. The OSA urges you to keep your email address up to date. This is important for a number of reasons.

**Protection and security:** The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly shown how vital it is to stay connected in times of crisis. Armed with your latest email address, your Swiss representation can contact you quickly and easily in a crisis. This is for your own protection and security.

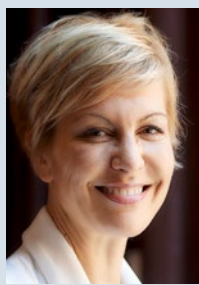
**Weight and influence:** All Swiss living abroad being reachable by email translates into greater political leverage for the "Fifth Switzerland". This is precisely what we want with a view to enabling direct elections to the "Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland", the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), to be staged online. Having everyone's email address offers the possibility to invite all Swiss Abroad to participate in a direct election – although at present it is not clear when such an election could take place. Essentially, direct elections enhance the legitimacy of the CSA. In turn, this will give the OSA greater weight and influence when it comes to representing the interests of the Swiss Abroad within Switzerland.

Furthermore, your email address is useful if there is an issue with postal deliveries in your country of residence and you receive the print edition of "Swiss Review" very late or not at all – in which case it is worth switching from the print edition to our free online edition. Once you have made the switch, we will send you a preview email before every new issue.

Please note that you should provide your local consulate, not the OSA, with your email address. For data protection reasons, the OSA cannot access the addresses of Swiss who live abroad. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) is responsible for managing the relevant address database. You can also enter your new or updated email address simply and easily via the FDFA's online desk for Swiss nationals residing abroad: [www.eda.admin.ch/swissabroad](http://www.eda.admin.ch/swissabroad). This dedicated government website is a one-stop shop, offering you convenient online access to a range of services.

I hope you enjoy this new issue of "Swiss Review". All the best, and stay safe.

Ariane Rustichelli  
OSA Director



## Switzerland and the COVID-19 pandemic



countries.

Switzerland dealt with COVID-19 in a very responsible manner. Of course, it is bad when people lose their jobs and futures. However, Switzerland's response was quick and, for once, unbu-reaucratic, unlike that of numerous EU

DANIEL TRÄCHSEL, MARZELL, GERMANY

Switzerland was caught napping like a lot of other countries, unfortunately. Countries that were prepared were hit much less severely (South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore). Will Switzerland learn from this? The chances of that are slim when you consider how reluctant the Swiss media have been to criticise.

ADRIEN LOEWENBERG, PORTUGAL

I agree that there was a support system in place, and that the federal government worked very hard to help the entire country (unlike in the US, where it is absolute chaos except in states whose governors are endowed with a modicum of common sense). It was reassuring to know that my mother in Geneva could seek help if necessary. However, many of the underprivileged lacked the necessary safety net. The long line of people queueing at a food bank in Geneva was a good example.

GUILLAUME DE SYON, LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA, USA

## Voters to give their verdict on paternity leave



I'm surprised Switzerland, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, is so behind in this case. If you ever gave birth to a child, you know how much energy it takes away from the mother. The support of the Daddy is so important for

the new born baby and the mother. It's a good investment for the whole family and even more so for the whole country.

RONALD THOMA, ONTARIO, CANADA

As a Swiss expatriate who has been living in Germany for many years, I am just horrified at how incredibly backward Switzerland is when it comes to things like this. Take the word 'Vaterschaftsurlaub' for example, which literally means 'paternity holiday'. Having a small child at home is anything but a holiday. Parenting is a wonderful but energy-sapping responsibility that extends over a good many years. Hence we refer to it as parental leave in Germany, because both parents can happily do their bit instead of the mother shouldering all the burden like she does in Switzerland.

ANDRÉ TSCHACHTLI, GERMANY

## The corona pandemic in Switzerland



I am totally against the introduction of paternity leave. If they want extra time to care for their children, fathers should take holiday leave, or, if they can, accumulate overtime hours during the months that precede the birth. Anyway, a working day only lasts eight hours. That still leaves plenty of time for fathers to take over from the mother and look after the baby.

CLAUDE-ALAIN GUYOT, CIREY, FRANCE

Switzerland is stuck in the Middle Ages when it comes to family support. Even ten days of statutory leave is a pathetic amount. It should be six months of leave for the two parents, consisting of at least 16 weeks of leave for the mother. Funnily enough, opponents of this measly proposal are the same people who are willing to harm the economy so that men aged between 25 and 40 can march around in circles and drink beer at the taxpayer's expense for three to four weeks EACH YEAR on those ridiculous military refresher courses. It appears that these people care little about the massive hit that employers have to take for something that has no national security relevance whatsoever.

MATTHIEU HÖSLI, FRANCE

### The "limitation initiative" and Switzerland's relationship with the EU

Aside from the fact that Switzerland will benefit economically from a closer relationship with the EU as globalisation intensifies, a politically strong, peaceful Europe is also very much in Switzerland's interests.

CHRISTOPH TWERENBOLD, COLOGNE, GERMANY

After selling off the big industries and becoming a service provider and acting zoo for the world, the people should see this is the wrong path. All these left-wing habits are poison for the country. Go back to what you were, an innovative, thriving, well educated people. Stop degrading your education system. Start creating and inventing again. The world is big, the EU is small and damaged by itself.

ULRICH HALTINER, DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Preserving Switzerland's neutrality is an absolute must. Hence making a reasonable contribution to the EU for co-operation and to fit the greater good would be desirable. To be bullied into a system of less flexibility would be a mistake. After all a relationship between partners can work very well, no need to be married.

KURT FEHLMANN, HERVEY BAY, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

The Federal Council started lifting coronavirus restrictions in Switzerland at the end of April, before ending the lockdown at the beginning of June. However, the number of new infections rose again as society reopened. Protective measures were consequently reinforced at the beginning of July. Apart from new nationwide rules such as mandatory face masks on public transport, additional restrictions apply in some cantons. Here are the key points in our COVID-19 timeline:

#### 6 June 2020: Significant easing of the lockdown

For many, 6 June marks a tentative return to everyday life. All educational establishments are allowed to open, as are swimming pools, zoos, botanic gardens, theatres, cinemas, restaurants, bars, and mountain railways.

#### 21 June 2020: Relaxation has serious consequences

People become more relaxed. Partygoers promptly become the first superspreaders. Infection clusters are also traced to holidaymakers who have returned from countries such as Serbia.

#### 30 June 2020: Infections rise

At the end of June, the daily number of new COVID-19 cases returns to three-digit territory for the first time since just before the lockdown in March 2020.

#### 6 July 2020: Mandatory face masks on public transport

In view of the growing infection rate, Switzerland makes face masks mandatory on all forms of public transport.

#### 8 August 2020: Back from holiday and into quarantine

Due to people coming home from holiday infected with COVID-19, anyone returning from a country that is on the list of destinations with a high risk of infection must now spend ten days in quarantine. After being updated on 8 August, this list comprises 42 European and non-European destinations. Current list of destinations:

[www.ogy.de/mandatory-quarantine](http://www.ogy.de/mandatory-quarantine)

A comprehensive timeline from April 2020 is available at [www.revue.ch](http://www.revue.ch).

# The divisive issue of mobile 5G

The federal government and Swiss telecommunication companies have ambitious plans to roll out the new standard in wireless connectivity. Not everyone in Switzerland is happy. Opposition is building in a country normally known for its tech credentials.

SUSANNE WENGER

5G stands for the fifth and latest generation of mobile technology. It can transmit even greater volumes of data than the 4G technology currently used in Switzerland. Each new wireless generation creates additional possibilities – something that has always gone down well with consumers. Relative to other populations, the Swiss spend a lot of money on digital devices that offer the mobile internet connectivity required to stream music and films, conduct video calls, and use apps. Switzerland was also an international front-runner when the government began auctioning 5G frequencies in early 2019.

According to the regulatory authority that issued the relevant licences, 5G is “vitally important” in driving digitalisation across the country. Three companies were awarded licences: Sunrise, Salt and the semi-public market leader Swisscom. Together, they paid the government a total of 380 million Swiss francs for the privilege. For Swisscom CEO Urs Schaeppi this technological upgrade is necessary due to the growing use of wireless networks (a twofold increase every 18 months). “We need to expand the network now before data bottlenecks become an issue,” he says.

## Switzerland – a tech pioneer

5G is also seen as key to boosting innovation in Switzerland. Those who champion 5G laud its ultra-high-speed and over-the-air data transmission capabilities that enable real-time connectivity between remote



By Max Spring, the “Swiss Review” cartoonist



machinery and devices. This ‘internet of things’ will make our homes smart and serve industry. Self-driving cars, telemedicine, virtual realities, and the interconnected, climate-friendly smart cities of the future will also rely on it. By allocating 5G frequencies before other countries, Switzerland has readily assumed the role of technology pioneer.

Yet the 5G offensive has met resistance. It is already available in some parts of Switzerland, albeit mostly in narrowband mode. This is because operators are unable to progress as quickly as planned. Opposition to 5G has been mounting within civil society. Grassroots movements are trying to block planning applications for 5G antennas. Anti-5G pressure groups mobilised thousands of people to attend a national protest rally last year in Berne. Parliamentary motions have been submitted at municipal and cantonal level. 5G antennas in church towers have been rejected. And French-speaking cantons have enacted their own 5G-related moratoriums, despite responsibility lying with the federal government. Some 5G masts have even been damaged in apparent acts of vandalism by the machine-breakers of the digital age.

### “Public health is paramount”

Opponents want a 5G moratorium for the whole of Switzerland. They warn of the “potential health risks” of electromagnetic fields and are worried about the visual impact of 5G masts as well as rising energy consumption and the environmental consequences. In

addition, they point to the security risk associated with installing technical infrastructure made in China. “Public health is paramount,” says the Grenchen-based watchmaker Rebekka Meier, who fronts the Schutz vor Strahlung (Protection from radiation) pressure group. Meier is concerned that the transmission power of 5G will accentuate the negative effects of mobile radiation “to an unprecedented extent”.

She sees the promises of the telecom sector as marketing, pure and simple. “They are making things up as they go along,” she maintains. In her view, our “appetite for high-definition, on-demand streaming” should not come at the cost of dotting the entire country with 5G masts. She believes that effective low-radiation solutions are a viable alternative, as seen in medicine for example.

### A wide spectrum of opponents

Opposition to 5G in Switzerland is broad-based. On the one hand we have the conspiracy theorists, then a large contingent who explicitly differentiate themselves from the conspiracy theorists. Some are anxious about the visual and environmental impact of 5G. Others criticise con-

**Many people joined a demonstration against 5G in Geneva last January.**

*Photo: Keystone*

sumerism. Some are digital-averse or electrosensitive. Members of the Doctors for the Environment pressure group have their own misgivings, as have both left-green and staunchly conservative politicians. SP National Councillor Martina Munz (canton of Schaffhausen) has vocalised these collective concerns in parliament. Munz insists she is no technophobe. However, she believes that the electromagnetic emissions from 5G need to be kept to the absolute minimum. “Eight per cent of our population say that they are electrosensitive,” she says. Instead of enabling 5G signals to penetrate every nook and cranny, Switzerland should focus on establishing an effective fibre-optic network. This would protect peo-

**New phone masts are necessary to expand 5G coverage across Switzerland. Opponents are up in arms.**

*Photo: Keystone*



ple from unwanted radio waves in their own home.

In Switzerland, statutory guidelines quantify how much electromagnetic radiation is still regarded as 'safe'. The Federal Council decided in spring to maintain the existing limits on mobile emissions – a move that pleased 5G critics more than the telecommunication sector. Telecom providers would prefer to instal fewer antennas and therefore wanted these limits to be eased.

## 5G proponents highlight the opportunities

Objections to phone masts have been a recurrent theme for Switzerland's mobile companies for the past 20 years. However, the advent of 5G has taken resistance to a whole new level. The influential liberal think tank Ave-



**Proponents of 5G say that the technology is key to developing self-drive motor vehicles. Pictured above: a driverless Swiss Post bus in Sion.**

Photo: Keystone

**Martina Munz (SP):**  
"Eight per cent of our population say that they are electro-sensitive."

Photo: parlament.ch

**Christian Wasserfallen (FDP):**  
"Ninety per cent of the emissions we absorb come from our own mobile devices."

Photo: parlament.ch

**Opponent of 5G, Rebekka Meier:**  
"Supporters of 5G are making things up as they go along."

Photo: schutz-vor-strahlung.ch

nir Suisse called this "irrational", while the conservative "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" referred to an "axis against progress". The telecom sector itself warns that the operational performance of communication networks could be seriously compromised. It is calling for greater support from politicians. Voices in favour of 5G are now making themselves heard in the federal parliament, with the Green Liberals and the Liberals (FDP) saying that 5G offers opportunities both of an economic nature and in terms of sustainability in areas such as agriculture.

FDP National Councillor Christian Wasserfallen (canton of Berne) says of the health-related concerns: "Ninety per cent of the emissions that we absorb come from our own mobile devices, not from phone masts." Wasserfallen wants a government information campaign to promote 5G. Whether this is enough remains to be seen. Clearly, many Swiss want a say on this cutting-edge technology. The ballot box will likely decide whether 5G proponents or 5G opponents get their way. As many as five popular initiatives against 5G have been launched.

"It's a popular uprising!" exclaimed one activist live on television.

## "Selling its soul"

Churches in Switzerland tend to be right in the middle of villages. Their central location and the height of their towers make them a preferred place for mounting mobile phone antennas. Hidden within the belfry, these masts barely have any visual impact. Contracts with telecom companies also provide parishes with income. However, pressure from the congregation has already resulted in many such parishes refusing to instal new 5G antennas or convert existing masts to 5G. Examples include Oberburg (Berne), Alpnach (Obwalden), Kriegstetten (Solothurn) and Belfaux (Fribourg). Besides the fear of electromagnetic smog, parishioners also cited ethical concerns. The church in Kriegstetten should not be "selling its soul", a member of the public told his local newspaper. Someone at a parish meeting in Alpnach reminded his fellow church-goers that "our church towers have transmitted information since time immemorial". His remained a minority view. (SWE)





# “Technology is never unpolitical”

The hostility to 5G in Switzerland comes as no surprise to historian Daniela Zetti. In her view, it is about much more than just mobile technology.

INTERVIEW: SUSANNE WENGER

**Daniela Zetti, are you surprised at the fierce opposition to 5G in Switzerland?**

No, not at all. I am more surprised at how long it took for people to voice their dissent. Switzerland’s digital mobile network was set up in 1993. Technology has a very important place in the national psyche. Take feats of civil engineering such as the Gotthard Tunnel or the Verzasca Dam, These man-made technological achievements have become

unique natural landmarks that people want to visit. And it is precisely because of Switzerland’s wealth of technology and technological infrastructure that such matters have always been the subject of intense debate and even controversy. This has always been an integral part of our Swiss DNA.

**Does 5G have any parallels to previous technology-related controversies in Switzerland?**

Trifling in comparison but a great analogy: the short-wave radio transmitter near the Bernese village of Schwarzenburg, which the old Postal,

Telegraph and Telephone (PTT) service began operating in 1939. Swiss Radio International used the transmitter to broadcast to the world, but the local population started to object. You could hear music through the drain pipes, and there was a permanent hum in the air. People reported health complications. Here we have another reason why opposition can arise in a high-tech country like Switzerland. When technology becomes a living, breathing, visible part of the landscape, the background ‘noise’ can have a negative effect on our bodies.

**Opponents of 5G have also cited health concerns.**

This is true. But whereas the PTT monopoly wielded enough natural authority to insist that the Schwarzenburg transmitter was vital for Switzerland, the mobile phone operators of today’s deregulated market are under more pressure to justify themselves. They are also in competition with each other. You could earn a lot of money in the 1990s by harnessing the latest telecommunication infrastructure. Those days are gone.

**For their part, proponents of 5G say that Switzerland needs the technology to avoid falling behind.**

This argument has followed digitalisation around since the 1970s. Innovation is the constant buzzword used to paint over the impact on the world around us. In reality, lots of low-range antennas are necessary for blanket 5G coverage. Furthermore, what purpose will this wireless technology serve? Who will be able to access it? And who will benefit from it? I get the impression that 5G lacks a united front that can explain all the benefits to the Swiss people.

**But most of us use smartphones and want good network coverage, don’t we?**

We already have pretty good network coverage in Switzerland. Alternatively, we can highlight self-driving cars and other innovations as examples of how 5G will enhance our lives. Yet this vision of the future elicits fascination and fear in equal measure. It is also highly unlikely to inspire broad swathes of society.

**How have previous technology-related controversies been resolved in the past?**

By following the democratic process. Technology is never unpolitical. It always has a societal dimension. Mobile network operators are now trying to counter the scepticism by making assurances on safety. They point out that there is no scientific evidence of possible harm to human health. It reminds me of Switzerland’s nuclear power plant operators. Caught off guard by hostile opposition, experts resorted to studies and statistics in an attempt to show how very minor the fallout from any accident would be. This strategy failed. It was a purely technical form of risk appraisal that could never cover the many different areas and concerns flagged up by opponents of nuclear power – from water pollution to federalism.



Daniela Zetti graduated from ETH Zurich with a PhD on the History of Technology. She currently works as a lecturer and researcher at the University of Lübeck.



## Cold weather: the trademark of La Brévine, even in summer

Set in the Neuchâtel mountains, the village holds the record for being the coldest inhabited place in Switzerland. Global warming may be disrupting its snowfall and low temperature records, but La Brévine is still drawing in the crowds.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

I arrived in La Brévine on 2 July, amid blustery weather. The valley of the same name was cloaked in fog. As I got off the bus in the village square, I suddenly shivered. Was my summer attire – a t-shirt and a light raincoat – going to be enough? The digital thermometer hanging in the square was showing just 18 degrees Celsius. It was the La Brévine effect! Perched at just over 1,000 metres in altitude within a depression in the Jura mountains, this commune in the canton of Neuchâtel

holds several records for its cold weather. Amongst them is the lowest temperature ever recorded by a MétéoSwiss local weather station: on 12 January 1987, the thermometer reached -41.8 degrees, setting the record for the coldest inhabited place in Switzerland. According to Jean-Maurice Gasser, the mayor of La Brévine: “It’s coldest first thing in the morning, when the sun is coming out. You would expect it to get warmer, but the sun’s rays clash with the cold from the ground.”

In the streets of this little village, crossed by four roads, a summertime stroller will find themselves sliding into a frosty fantasy. There is a shop which rents out cross-country skis on wheels during the summer, named Siberia Sports. A hostel, closed at the moment, bears the name Loup blanc (White wolf). Behind it is the Alaska furniture shop, and Isba, the Russian for a log hut, an old restaurant. But the village’s icy reputation has not always been so well celebrated: “its reputation made people think that the peo-



ple were cold as well, whereas in fact, the cold doesn't change anything. We just go about our business as usual," comments Jean-Daniel Oppliger, manager of the restaurant and new hotel, the Hôtel-de-Ville. Oppliger participated in the launch of the Fête du froid (Cold festival), which first took place in 2012, in glacial winds.

## Warmer winters and 30-degree summers

The teeth-chattering weather has been transformed into a marketing strategy. "We've had up to 5,000 visitors from Switzerland and France come to celebrate the cold," enthuses

the mayor who was in charge of the renovation and transformation of the Hôtel-de-Ville restaurant. This municipal property now offers accommodation for up to 27 tourists, as well as a large room at the back for hosting local events. La Brévine and its population of 630 are quite prosperous. "Finances are stable," says Jean-Maurice Gasser. All the same, he would like to welcome some new people to the area, as it is "gradually growing smaller".

At Siberia Sports, Pascal Schneider, who supplements his income by working as a carpenter during the summer, relies on the snow to keep his business running. He watches the winters go by in the knowledge that

La Brévine, known as the "Siberia of Switzerland", remains relatively cool over the summer months. The village inhabitants are quite used to the chilly weather. Pictured here: mayor Jean-Maurice Gasser (left); farmers Kevin and Grégory Huguenin (centre); and Geneviève Kohler, who chairs the village's society for local development (right).

Photos: Danielle Liniger



**Higher, further, faster, more beautiful? In search of the somewhat different Swiss records. This edition: The coldest municipality in Switzerland.**

the years of snowfall perfect for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing belong to the past. "Last winter there was almost nothing. People were only able to go cross-country skiing three or four times. We could only use 30 kilometres of the 163 km track in the valley," he remarks. Schneider grew up in the area and has seen the temperatures in Little Siberia change completely during his lifetime. "When I was younger, the temperatures would stay between -15 and -30 degrees for three weeks at a time. These days, we might see -25 degrees one morning and then rain two days later. In summer 2019, it was 30 degrees for two whole weeks," he says.

Another one for the record books: in 2006, temperatures in La Brévine reached 36 degrees.

## Cold weather, warm hearts

Nevertheless, the summer nights remain chilly with the possibility of frost from mid-August onwards. In any case, tourists arrive in La Brévine with their own thermometer in mind. “People tell me it’s not all that cold,” says the manager of the sports shop. Even if it’s a few degrees warmer in winter now, higher up in the 20 km-long valley, the work of agricultural workers is still harder than elsewhere in Switzerland. In Cernil, at 1,200 metres in altitude, Kevin and Grégory Huguenin tell of their days spent out in the cold looking after their 100-strong cattle herd. Work begins at 5am, sometimes with a few strikes of a pickaxe to unfreeze the doors and a blowtorch to heat up the ends of the drinking pipes. “It’s a constant battle against the cold,” remarks Grégory, who remembers his first winter working in Cernil, with a thermometer showing -15 degrees and almost -30 degrees at the farm below, in Brouillet.



**A wintery La Brévine. Provided there is enough snow on the ground, the village is a mecca for snowshoe walkers and particularly cross-country skiers.**

Photo: Keystone

Reproduced by permission of the Federal Office of Topography, swisstopo (BAZ00147)



## The secrets of the cold

In reality, the icy climate of La Brévine is caused by several factors. The main one is that the village is set in a closed off depression, where the cold stagnates, creating a meteorological phenomenon called a “cold air lake”. For this phenomenon to occur, there needs to be high atmospheric pressure, a clear sky and an absence of wind and snow. In such situations, the neighbouring passes and mountaintops can show a difference of up to 30 degrees in temperature compared to the valley below. This is what was shown by a study completed in 2014 by the Institute of Geography at the University of Neuchâtel. (SH)

Despite, or perhaps because of, this the two young brothers, who represent the seventh generation of Huguenins to live in the valley, love their region. The cold weather warms local hearts. “Around here, you can knock on anyone’s door and they’ll invite you in to eat,” says Kevin. “There aren’t a lot of people living in the valley, around 1,500 perhaps, but the people are there for each other,” adds his brother.

## Crisp summer nights

In summer, the valley and its three villages, of which La Brévine is the only cold weather record holder, transform into a haven of sunny, crisp evenings. At two kilometres from the village, the Lac des Taillières is frozen in winter. But in summer, its murky waters see windsurfers and kitesurfers galore. The steppe-like high plateau offers countless scenic hiking paths, including notably a trail of border markers set out in 1819 touching the edge of neighbouring France. A historic walk incorporates 18 information panels, which provide an insight into this land of frost and snow. Geneviève Kohler, President of the society for local development, takes us to station number 13, a beautiful building and home to the parents of the Huguenin brothers. The lodge hides an old fer-

ruginous spring, once known for its restorative qualities.

Another noteworthy body of water is the village stream. Known as “le Bied”, it disappears into a sinkhole, a sort of natural well, only to reappear in the Val-de-Travers. The part in La Brévine, set in the heart of the village, resembles something of a canyon. In 2018, the hole became clogged and overflowed, causing a flood. “People had 30 cm of water in their homes,” recalls the mayor of the commune. For the manager of the Hôtel-de-Ville, this is one of the factors explaining the Siberian climate of La Brévine. “In other mountain valleys in Neuchâtel, the water flows along the surface and carries the cold away with it,” explains Jean-Daniel Oppliger. “But here, le Bied disappears and the cold is left behind.” Could this be the real explanation? Perhaps, although the extreme temperatures of La Brévine could have a thousand explanations.



## An uncomfortable issue for multinationals

Should Swiss companies be liable for human rights abuses or environmental violations that they have caused in other countries? Yes, according to the Responsible Business Initiative that was submitted in 2016. After years of political horse-trading, voters will give their verdict on 29 November.

THEODORA PETER

In Zambia, sulphur fumes at a copper mine cause respiratory diseases among the local population. A quarter of all children in the Australian mining town of Mount Isa have excessively high levels of lead in their blood. In both cases, responsibility for the harmful emissions lies with businesses in which the Swiss mining company Glencore has a majority stake. At times, emissions at the Zambian copper mine have been significantly above the accepted levels set by the World Health Organization (WHO). One of the smelters in need of upgrade has now been shut down by the Glencore-owned company operating the plant. Glencore say that they have already done a lot to cut pollution overall. In Australia, the company also paid for television adverts showing the local population how to clean contaminated dust from their homes. Critics

say that Glencore are merely treating the symptoms, not the cause.

Other Swiss mining companies also regularly come under fire for their business models. For example, raw gold processed at Swiss refineries may potentially come from dubious mines where working conditions violate human rights (see “Swiss Review” 3/2019 for more details).

The initiative “for responsible companies – protecting human rights and the environment” (Responsible Business Initiative) is backed by an alliance comprising 120 relief agencies as well as churches, trade unions, and environmental and human rights organisations, all of whom want Swiss-based multinationals – potentially around 1,500 companies – to be held more accountable.

They say that companies should not only be bound by due diligence, but should also be liable for damage

that they or any of their subsidiaries have caused as a result of human rights abuses or environmental violations. Specifically, victims should be able to seek redress in the Swiss civil courts. To escape liability, defendants would have to prove that they did everything within their power to exercise due diligence.

### Hard bargaining in parliament

The initiative has alarmed businesses that see it as a threat to their global operations and commercial freedom. Yet polls show that the idea has significant public support. Parliament’s search for a compromise proposal involved a considerable degree of horse-trading. The National Council wanted to meet the authors of the initiative halfway – satisfying their core demands by proposing new corporate liability requirements in company law.

But the Council of States blocked this, a majority of its members viewing the regulation as unnecessary and damaging for Swiss business. Ultimately, both parliamentary chambers agreed on a watered-down indirect counterproposal to impose reporting obligations, whereby companies would merely have to include details in their annual reports of how they carry out their duty of care. This arrangement is equivalent to the EU’s accountability principle (see box). It would automatically come into effect if the initiative was rejected.

### “Token counterproposal”

Dick Marty, co-chair of the Responsible Business Initiative, has called it a

**Daily life in the Zambian town of Kankoyo, where people live directly adjacent to the Mopani copper mines.**

Archive photo 2015: Keystone





**Dick Marty believes that companies will only conform when human rights violations have consequences.** Photo: parlament.ch

**Andrea Gmür: the initiative tars all companies with the same brush and will lead to “extortionate lawsuits”.**

Photo: parlament.ch

“toothless token counterproposal”. “As we all know, the worst culprits tend to be the ones with glossy company brochures,” says the former state prosecutor of the canton of Ticino and former FDP member of the Council of States. Marty, who made a name for himself outside Switzerland as the Council of Europe’s special rapporteur on human rights, believes that companies will only conform when human rights violations have consequences.

Opponents from the business community and the centre-right parties say that the initiative clearly overshoots the mark. Andrea Gmür, CVP member of the Council of States for the canton of Lucerne, is particularly concerned that the proposed changes would “reverse the burden of proof”. Obliging companies to prove their innocence “contradicts the principles of

**A banner supporting the initiative. The referendum campaign is sure to heat up on both sides of the argument.** Photo: Keystone



the rule of law” and will lead to “extortionate international lawsuits”. Tarring all companies with the same brush is unacceptable, says Gmür, who sits on the board of the Central Switzerland Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

## The heat is on this autumn

The referendum campaign should heat up at the beginning of October, as soon as Switzerland’s associations and political parties have digested the mammoth round of votes on 27 September (see “Swiss Review” 4/2020). In addition to support from the SP and the Greens, the initiative is backed by a civic committee consisting of members of all political parties. Volunteers from civil society have also established committees at local grassroots level to assist with the campaign effort.

Wealthy business federation Economiesuisse is running the No campaign. It wants to rectify the “unscrupulous” image of multinationals and highlight positive factors such as job creation in developing countries.

## Due diligence in other countries

Since 2018, companies in the EU have been held accountable for how they exercise human rights and environmental due diligence. However, the European Commission is now looking to tighten the EU’s applicable directive. There are also growing calls for the introduction of a law on supply chains, which would require a stronger commitment by companies to avoid contingent risk. At the end of 2019, the German government held out the prospect of a supply chain law after a voluntary action plan met with limited success. A “duty of vigilance” law has been in effect in France since 2017, establishing civil liability for the consequences of due diligence failures. Other European countries are planning legislation that would require companies to perform due diligence in accordance with the EU directive. In 2019, the UK Supreme Court decided to allow claims to be heard against companies with regard to human rights violations committed by subsidiaries of these companies abroad. (TP)

Responsible Business Initiative website:

[www.corporatejustice.ch](http://www.corporatejustice.ch)

The No campaign:

[www.leere-versprechen-nein.ch](http://www.leere-versprechen-nein.ch)

# Arms industry in the crossfire

Swiss arms exports come in for regular criticism. Two popular initiatives have the weapons industry in their sights. One of these is due to be put to voters on 29 November.



THEODORA PETER

“Stop lining the pockets of arms manufacturers” is a popular initiative that was launched with the aim of halting Swiss investment in the global arms industry. The authors of the initiative – the Group for a Switzerland without an Army (GSWA) and the Greens – say that pension funds, foundations, and the Swiss National Bank should not be allowed to invest in companies that generate more than five per cent of their sales from the manufacture of military equipment. As a neutral country and custodian of the Geneva Conventions, Switzerland must refrain from “taking monetary advantage of war victims”, they argue.

However, the Federal Council and parliament have rejected the initiative without offering a counterproposal. Economics Minister Guy Parmelin (SVP) believes that existing bans on the funding of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons as well as cluster

munitions are sufficient. The initiative would affect many companies with little or no connection to the arms industry, he says, citing the example of a glass manufacturer producing windows for the cockpits of fighter jets in addition to normal windows.

Backed exclusively by the left-green camp, the proposal is likely to find the going tough – as was the case with earlier GSWA initiatives. In 2009, a popular initiative calling for a ban on the export of military equipment was decisively rejected by around 68 per cent of the electorate.

## No exports to war-torn regions

The prospects look rosier for a cross-party popular initiative that aims to stop arms exports to war-torn countries. Unlike the unsuccessful initiative of 2009, this initiative does not want a total ban on military exports. Instead, it is calling for a ban on the ex-

**Model tanks, not real tanks – supporters of the “Stop lining the pockets of arms manufacturers” initiative protesting in Berne (2017).**

Photo: Keystone

port of Swiss arms to countries engaged in civil war, or to countries in which systematic and serious human rights violations are taking place.

The “Correction Initiative”, as it is called, was launched after the Federal Council announced plans to permit military exports to war-torn countries if there was no reason to believe that these exports would be used in conflict. The government’s thinking was that this would boost the Swiss arms industry. Fierce criticism persuaded it to change its mind. Nevertheless, the authors of the initiative still wish to reverse a parliamentary decision in 2014 that permits arms exports to countries known for systematic human rights violations. The Federal Council wants to submit a counterproposal to parliament that will go some way to satisfying the aims of the initiative. The cross-party alliance have not ruled out withdrawing their proposal if appropriate legislation is passed. Hence, it still remains to be seen whether any vote on the initiative will take place.

## Twofold increase in arms exports

In the first half of 2020, Swiss companies exported military equipment worth 501 million francs. This is almost twice the value of what was exported in the prior-year period (273 million francs). According to the government, this fluctuation is not unusual and is attributable to a number of major contracts. The list of buyers includes 55 countries. Indonesia was Switzerland’s biggest arms importer in the first six months of the year, purchasing air defence systems worth 110 million Swiss francs. Botswana spent 64 million francs on Swiss-made armoured vehicles over the same period. Denmark, Romania and Germany were the biggest recipients of Swiss military equipment in Europe. (TP)

# The literary stimulus of riding a bicycle

Genevan Charles-Albert Cingria lived in Paris for 39 years, his highly idiosyncratic short-form writing style bearing testimony to the life of a tireless traveller.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

On 19 March 1911, a fist fight took place in front of Saint-Joseph Church in Geneva. It was the talk of the town for weeks. Charles-Albert Cingria (28) knocked down Gonzague de Reynold (31) with a single punch. Cingria, stocky in physique, had taken offence at a letter that the slenderly built de Reynold had written to the local newspaper.

The son of immigrants from Dalmatia, Cingria had had a reputation for getting into trouble ever since abbey school. A propensity for violence had always been his Achilles heel – a likely symptom of denying his own homosexuality. The ideas that Cingria espoused were often abstruse, but his prowess as a musicologist and historian was unsurpassed. Contemporaries profoundly admired his writing – so much so that, when the author was jailed for paederasty in Italy in 1926, it was none other than arch-enemy Gonzague de Reynold who secured his release.

## “Talking Cingria”

In particular, Cingria made a name for himself through his ubiquitous short-form writing – now known as “Talking Cingria”. Always rendered in the present tense, these first-person narratives consistently give the impression of someone speaking directly to the reader. In almost every case, they owe their immediacy to the author’s personal experiences on trips across Europe. Despite being a citizen of Geneva, Cingria lived in a Parisian one-room apartment – the starting point for each of his itineraries – between 1915 and his death on 1 August 1954. The eccentrically attired Cingria, the archetypal dandy of his era, nearly always did his tours on bicycle.

## Lodging with friends

After the family fortune was exhausted, Cingria had to lodge with a variety of friends, for whom it was both a curious and an unforgettable experience when the writer turned up at their door. Cingria always took a foldable leather bath tub on his bicycle. He would bathe in this contraption as soon as he got into his room – then join his hosts at the table, bath towel wrapped around his head like a turban. Eventually, he would retire to scribble down his short texts – works which essentially were nothing more than a perpetual conversation with an imaginary person.

Cingria writes about his beloved bicycle, about the joy of travelling in a restaurant car, and about the station buffet in Berne. He eulogises tobacco, refers to a naked female animal tamer, and expounds on the peculiarity of speaking machines. Besides his keen observational eye and virtuosity with words, it is his humour and intelligence that lend something profound and often even anarchic to the seemingly innocuous patter. The wacky cyclist and wordsmith was very aware that people would also remember him for his oddball personality as well as his literature. Otherwise, he would not have conveyed the following ambiguity to his friend Abdul Wahab in Paris, while he was being detained in Switzerland in 1940 on account of the war: “If you see the charlatans, make them think I am in Paris and have simply moved to a different neighbourhood. I want to get them to invent legends about people and show that the weaknesses of these people are in fact strengths.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Available in German: Charles-Albert Cingria, “Ja, jeden Tag neu geboren werden ...” (Yes, born again every day). Reminiscences, glosses, theories and polemics. Biographical epilogue by editor Charles Linsmayer. Reprinted by Huber (no. 18), Frauenfeld, 2001.



“In particular, I must insist that a bicycle is in no way unbecoming of a literary author. On the contrary, my bicycle is a tremendous intellectual stimulant. First, it is aesthetically pleasing as well as practical in its own right. Then we have the handlebars, around which sulphur-yellow, black and reddish sticking plaster is rolled. If this fails to stir your heart, you may be uncomfortable when the conversation turns to art, but you will also never appreciate the highest points of a Greek tragedy.”

Excerpt from “Lob des Fahrrads” (In praise of the bicycle) in “Ja, jeden Tag neu geboren werden” (Yes, born again every day); Huber, Frauenfeld, 2001.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST IN ZÜRICH



# Streaming alone will not save Swiss cinema

Platforms promoting Swiss films saw rapid growth during the corona lockdown period. But it won't be enough to save Swiss-style auteur cinema.

KATY ROMY \*

Cinemas shut, shooting on hold, film festivals cancelled. For almost two months, the lockdown imposed in Switzerland to protect inhabitants from the COVID-19 pandemic brought the film industry to a standstill.

Whether to kill time or to indulge their passion for cinema, people in lockdown from all over the world have turned to streaming or video on demand (VOD). Film consumption has reached record highs. Industry leader Netflix has recorded the strongest

growth levels since its creation. But in the midst of the giant American platforms, small Swiss productions are invisible.

Swiss cinema is promoted on local portals, such as Cinefile, Filmingo and Artfilm, which also saw rapid growth at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of Filmingo users quadrupled. Cinefile recorded five times more viewers than throughout all of 2019, while the little platform Artfilm, dedicated exclusively to Swiss


productions, saw 20 times more traffic than usual. But despite this significant growth, streaming will not be able to save Swiss cinema, according to key actors in the sector.

## Streaming is not a business model

Laurent Dutoit, CEO of distribution company Agora Films and owner of several independent cinemas in Geneva, considers that local portals have made it possible to “maintain contact with the clientele and preserve the cultural side of things”. “However, the increase in the number of users is insignificant compared to the drop in people visiting the cinemas,” he states.

RECOMMENDATION 1

## Citoyen Nobel



Stéphane Goël (CH, 2020). *Citoyen Nobel* was released a week before the lockdown. It tells the story of how life changed overnight for Swiss scientist Jacques Dubochet after he won the 2017 Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

Film website: [www.citoyennobel.com](http://www.citoyennobel.com)  
Trailer: [ogy.de/trailer-citoyen-nobel](https://ogy.de/trailer-citoyen-nobel)

RECOMMENDATION 2

## Platzspitzbaby



Pierre Monnard (CH, 2020). *Needle Park Baby* was at the top of the Swiss film charts before the cinemas had to shut in March 2020. Set in the 1990s just after the closure of Zurich's open drugs scene, its story centres on a girl whose mother is addicted to heroin.

Film website: [www.platzspitzbaby.ch](http://www.platzspitzbaby.ch)  
Trailer: [ogy.de/trailer-platzspitzbaby](https://ogy.de/trailer-platzspitzbaby)

## Discover the world of Swiss film

With film lists that are continually updated, Swiss streaming and video-on-demand platforms allow you to watch Swiss films even if you live abroad. Here are our latest movie tips.

One week before the lockdown, Agora Films brought out the documentary “Citoyen Nobel”, directed by Stéphane Goël from Lausanne, on the subject of Jacques Dubochet, winner of the 2017 Nobel Prize for Chemistry. “We tried to release the film again when we re-opened, but it was too late. We lost 10,000 tickets for that film alone, which represents a loss greater than all of the viewings of Swiss films through streaming for the entire period,” he explains.

Even if streaming is winning over a growing number of viewers, it is cinemas that generate sales revenue. The CEO of Agora Films estimates that the cinema accounts for more than 50 percent of film earnings, while streaming makes up a maximum of 20 percent. “On the big platforms, which are the ones that work best, there is even

more competition from American films,” remarks Dutoit.

### Save Swiss cinema by saving the cinemas

In Switzerland, the most successful VOD service remains that of the country’s primary telephone operator, Swisscom TV. “But people watch the films that are advertised on the home page, which are those with the greatest potential commercial value,” comments Dutoit. As such, Swiss auteur films have low visibility. The prognosis of this distributor is clear: “Swiss cinema won’t survive on its own. If we want to save it, we have to ensure the survival of cinemas and independent distributors.”

Watching a film on the big screen from the comfort of a cinema chair and eating popcorn is a collective experience. Director and President of the Swiss Filmmakers Association (Association Suisse des scénaristes),



RECOMMENDATION 

## Moskau einfach!



Micha Lewinsky (CH, 2020). In autumn 1989, at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, hundreds of thousands of people are being spied on in Switzerland. Unfortunately, zealous policeman Viktor falls in love with the actress he is supposed to monitor.

**Streaming:** [www.kino-on-demand.ch](http://www.kino-on-demand.ch)  
**Trailer:** [ogy.de/trailer-moskva](http://ogy.de/trailer-moskva)



RECOMMENDATION 


## The Mistress




Andrea Štaka (CH/DE, 2006). Since fleeing the former Yugoslavia in search of a better life in Switzerland, Serbian Ruža has managed to establish herself. Then young Ana from Sarajevo enters the scene. The film explores the pain of loneliness and of breaking with your own past

**Streaming:** [www.cinefile.ch](http://www.cinefile.ch) oder [www.artfilm.ch](http://www.artfilm.ch)  
**Trailer:** [ogy.de/trailer-fraeulein](http://ogy.de/trailer-fraeulein)



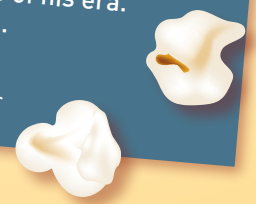
RECOMMENDATION 

## Paradise War – The Story of Bruno Manser



Nilkaus Hilber (CH, 2019). In 1984, Swiss Bruno Manser travels into the jungles of Borneo to take up the fight of the Penan tribe whose existence is acutely threatened by deforestation. He becomes one of the most renowned environmentalists of his era. But there is no happy ending.

**Streaming:** [www.cinefile.ch](http://www.cinefile.ch)  
**Trailer:** [ogy.de/trailer-manser](http://ogy.de/trailer-manser)



## Taking teens to the screens

According to Swiss owners and distributors, teenagers have abandoned the cinema. Certainly, the children's cinema club, "la Lanterne magique", which has 20,000 members in Switzerland, helps those aged between 6 and 12 years to discover the seventh art, but does this mean that they will grow into fans of the cinema itself? The answer is no. "Cultural autonomy develops between 15 and 20 years old. It is therefore necessary to offer something to this age group," explains Ilan Vallotton, director of "la Lanterne magique".

The association and other industry players have therefore developed the #ciné concept, to entice 14-18 year olds to reinvest in film and become regular cinema-goers. Currently present in eight towns throughout the country, the project entrusts the organisation of cinematic events destined for teens to groups of adolescents of the same age. Once a month, they take over a cinema in their town to present a preview of a film of their choosing. "The idea is to position the cinema as a place where adolescents can take control," explains Ilan Vallotton.

(KR)

Barbara Miller, highlights the need to preserve the idea of the cinema as a meeting place, but also a place for exchange with the audience, particularly during festivals. "Streaming is a reality and it is set to grow. But I hope that it won't become too popular, as it would really detract from our sector," she comments.

### Glimmer of hope

The director fears the "Americanisation" of the seventh art. To fight against this phenomenon, the Swiss cinema industry is placing its hopes in the amendment of Switzerland's Film Act, currently under discussion in parliament. Under the amendment, online providers would be required to invest at least 4 percent (gross) of their receipts in Swiss cinema, or else pay a corresponding tax. These platforms

would also be required to ensure that European productions make up 30 percent of the films in their national catalogue. "This would make it possible to guarantee the screening of independent films, and prevent the disappearance of our culture. This type of measure already works very well in other European countries," concludes Miller.

Local portals offering films through streaming:


[www.filmingo.ch/en/](http://www.filmingo.ch/en/)

[www.artfilm.ch/en/artfilm-ch](http://www.artfilm.ch/en/artfilm-ch)


[www.en.cinefile.ch/](http://www.en.cinefile.ch/)

\*KATY ROMY IS AN EDITOR WITH SWISSINFO.

[WWW.SWISSINFO.CH](http://WWW.SWISSINFO.CH)

RECOMMENDATION 

### The Divine Order



Petra Volpe (CH, 2017). It is 1971. Nora lives with her husband and two sons in a quiet Swiss village. When she begins to petition for women's suffrage, this has consequences in her village and in her own family.

Streaming: [www.cinefile.ch](http://www.cinefile.ch)  
Trailer: [ogy.de/trailer-ordnung](http://ogy.de/trailer-ordnung)

RECOMMENDATION 

### Alpine Fire



Fredi M. Murer (CH, 1985). Franzi, a deaf boy, and his sister Belli live on an isolated farm. Their father refuses to send Franzi to a home. Belli, who wanted to become a teacher, has to give her brother lessons. The two of them become inseparable and have a fateful close encounter. A moving piece of Swiss cinematic gold.

Streaming: [www.cinefile.ch](http://www.cinefile.ch)  
Trailer: [ogy.de/trailer-hoehenfeuer](http://ogy.de/trailer-hoehenfeuer)

# Switzerland's "colonialism without colonies"

The Black Lives Matter protests began in America, but their reverberations in Switzerland have been surprisingly strong. Why?

JÜRIG STEINER

It started with a video of a white police officer using brutal force that led to the death of Afro-American George Floyd in the US city of Minneapolis. The footage was shared on social media around the world. In mid-June, thousands of mostly young people took part in anti-racism demonstrations in Swiss cities. The Black Lives Matter rallies, mostly peaceful, were tolerated by the authorities despite the restrictions to stop the spread of COVID-19.

However, it was not the imported nature of the protests that was exceptional, but how quickly attention turned to the issue of everyday racism towards black people in Switzerland, even though Switzerland has never had any colonies and has never been known as a country in which the state apparatus clearly discriminates against non-whites.

"Switzerland has never existed in splendid isolation"

"I think there is a growing realisation among younger people that Switzerland has never existed in splendid isolation," says historian Bernhard C. Schär. "Which is actually quite astonishing, given that the Swiss history curriculum still mainly takes the opposite view." Schär, who works at ETH Zurich, is one of a group of historians who are trying to promote a critical reappraisal of Switzerland's history in the global context.

This perspective on Switzerland that many like to ignore, is becoming increasingly popular, not least because 40 percent of people who live in Switzerland have an immigrant background. And because 70 percent of people employed by Swiss companies work abroad. "Switzerland's story has always been more than about what happens only in Switzerland and in Europe," says Schär. Fewer and fewer people identify with a view of history confined within Switzerland's physical borders. Taking a more open approach to Switzerland's past automatically involves encountering elements of colonialism and racism.

This extends to everyday life. According to a report by the Swiss Service for Combating Racism (SCRA), 59 percent

of Swiss believe that racism is a serious problem in Switzerland, while 36 percent of people living in Switzerland with an immigrant background say that they experienced discrimination in the period from 2013 to 2018 – mainly in the work environment or when looking for employment.

It is also normal nowadays for young Swiss to work with colleagues who have a different skin colour. Thanks to social media too, the YouTube generation are no strangers to the issue of racism. Clips of black American television comedians such as Trevor Noah, born in South Africa to a Swiss expatriate father, are also viewed in Switzerland. Consequently, the brutal, racist circumstances of George Floyd's death are even more of a cue to question the reality at home, given that police violence also occurs in Switzerland. In 2018, for example, a black man died in Lausanne from respiratory arrest after being pinned to the ground by police officers.

## Controversial memorials

Switzerland has plenty of historical objects that would inspire the wrath of anti-racism activists. These include memorials to Swiss economic pioneers and scientists whose involvement in the history of colonial exploitation has long been swept under the carpet. Take David de Pury, who left his home city of Neuchâtel a huge fortune after his death. The merchant acquired part of his wealth by trading slaves at the Portuguese court in the 18th century. A bronze statue in Neuchâtel honours de Pury's legacy. Following a Black Lives Matter protest, activists smeared the statue with red paint to symbolise the blood of slaves. A petition was also launched to remove the monument.

The controversy surrounding the brilliant 19th-century glaciologist Louis Agassiz, who expounded racist theories that were used by white Americans to legitimise discrimination against blacks, has flared up again after simmering for years. A mountain peak situated on the cantonal boundary between Berne and Valais is named after Agassiz. Historian Hans Fässler, who heads the Dismantle Louis Agas-





**Despite the COVID-19 restrictions, thousands demonstrated against racism in Basel at the beginning of June 2020.**

Photo: Keystone

siz committee, has been calling for the peak to be renamed for the last 15 years. However, the three municipalities bordering the mountain have steadfastly rejected the request.

Misgivings have also centred around Zurich entrepreneur Alfred Escher, whose well-connected family owned coffee plantations in Cuba where slaves worked. And even Henri Dunant ran his own colonial business before founding the International Committee of the Red Cross. In their book entitled “Postkoloniale Schweiz” (Postcolonial Switzerland), a group of Swiss historians document how Dunant set up a financial scheme for a Genevan grain producer in Sétif, Algeria.

According to the same book, Switzerland’s “colonialism without colonies” was beneficial not only to wealthy industrialists but to members of the middle and working classes

as well – like the mercenaries who fought for the French Foreign Legion in the French colonies. Hence, the long-hidden legacy of Switzerland’s role in colonialism is an issue that transcends the rights and wrongs of knocking down statues.

### The role of black people

Of greater immediacy are the recent protests that have fuelled the conversation on how institutional racism affects the lives of black people in present-day Switzerland. Most black people who speak publicly say that racial profiling by the police and authorities is an everyday aspect of their lives. A UN report has criticised Switzerland for doing too little to combat it.



**David de Pury (1709-1786)** Neuchâtel-born David de Pury earned his fortune in Portugal, where he was involved in the diamond trade with Brazil before turning significant attention to the slave trade. The shipping company Pernambuco e Paraíba, of which he was a shareholder, deported more than 42,000 African prisoners between 1761 and 1786. De Pury was appointed to the court of the King of Portugal in 1762. He bequeathed his immense wealth to the city of Neuchâtel, helping to fund the construction of buildings that still dominate the city.



**Louis Agassiz (1807-1873)** Jean Louis Rodolphe Agassiz, from the canton of Fribourg, studied glaciers and fish fossils at the beginning of his career. After emigrating to the USA in 1846, he became a renowned academic at Harvard University. The views on race which Agassiz developed and expounded in America are a problematic legacy. Agassiz wanted to scientifically validate his theory that black slaves were inferior to whites, calling them a “degraded and degenerate race”. He became a vehement and influential supporter of racial segregation.



**Alfred Escher (1819-1882)** Zurich-born business leader, railway entrepreneur, politician, and Credit Suisse founder Alfred Escher (pictured here as President of the National Council in 1849) was a driving force in Switzerland’s development as a nation during the 19th century. When Escher was still alive, his family were accused of benefiting from slavery. According to a historical study published in 2017, the Escher family owned a Cuban coffee plantation where dogs guarded slaves who were forced to work 14 hours a day.

Zambian-Malawian theatre artist Mbene Mwambene, who lives in Berne, says that the racism he encounters in Switzerland is different to racism in America. He calls it “covert” and based on contradictory stereotypes. On the one hand, people more or less expect him to be a good dancer because he is African. On the other, he regularly gets stopped and searched for drugs.

The Swiss police reject the accusation of racial profiling. Police officers in Switzerland do two years of basic training before entering service, during which they address fundamental principles such as respect for human rights. The head of the St. Gallen cantonal police force, Fredy Fässler (SP), says that trainee police officers are consistently reminded of the perils of racial profiling.

Black intellectuals who live in Switzerland have played a decisive role in reigniting the country’s debate

on racism – personalities who together have brought the reality of the racism that they face in everyday life into the public domain. University academics such as the black Swiss anthropologist Serena Dankwa are regularly interviewed in the media. There is growing agreement with one of the key thrusts of what Dankwa is saying: that people should finally recognise there is a connection between the racist, colonial view of Africa that Switzerland also used to share and the systematic marginalisation that affects all black people today.

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Photo: Christoph Köstlin

## Lea Sprunger and the 13-stride challenge

Swiss athlete Lea Sprunger was the first woman to run a 300m hurdles race with only 13 strides between the first two hurdles. She achieved this feat at the height of her career.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

On 11 June, at the Oslo Impossible Games, Lea Sprunger, born in Nyon 30 years ago and the first Swiss female to become a European athletics champion in the 400 metres hurdles discipline, accomplished a historical feat. She ran a 300 metres hurdles race with only 13 strides between the first two of the seven hurdles on the track, as opposed to the standard 14 or 15. This was a first in women's athletics, as only male athletes had managed it until then. One notable example being the American Edwin Moses who managed 13 strides between every hurdle in a 400 metres hurdles race.

“As there are no major championships right now, this exploit focused people's attention on something different,” explains Laurent Meuwly, who has been training Sprunger

since 2007. As for the athlete herself, she says: “It's a stride which suits me. At the beginning of the race, I felt faster than in a 400 metres event and I passed in front of the others. But it's ultimately the time that counts.” Reducing the number of strides takes a lot of energy. In Oslo, the sprinter achieved a time of 39.86 seconds, compared to 39.25 seconds recently in Zurich. “She paid for the initial effort at the end of the race,” concludes Meuwly.

### A double-edged figure

The question of the number of strides between hurdles is a sort of science, with the number 13 seemingly unachievable for a woman. “Lea is the only athlete to have been able to succeed in a race like this – with strides of up to 2.38



metres – because of her height (1.83m) and her strength,” explains her coach. As such, in the finals of the World Championship in Doha in 2019, where Sprunger beat the Swiss 400 metres hurdles record, only two athletes out of eight completed the course in 14 strides, with the others completing 15 strides between the ten hurdles.

A further difficulty with this technique is the change in the number of strides for passing over the hurdles, which are spaced 35 metres apart. In Oslo, the Swiss champion scrupulously followed a programme that had been prepared down to the very last metre: 21 strides at maximum speed for 45 metres, twice 13 strides between the first two hurdles, then twice 14 strides and then twice 15 strides. These adaptations cost the athlete a lot of energy. For all of these reasons, she will not necessarily be using the technique in future competitions, “but she will continue to work on it” states Meuwly.

The historic 13 strides were achieved at a time where Lea Sprunger was in peak form. Her sporting career will effectively come to an end at the close of the 2021 season. “For three years, her body and her mind have been aligned and top results have kept coming. It is the peak of a long journey, which she began at the age of ten,” explains her trainer. What is the next goal for this athlete from the canton of Vaud, brought up by two Swiss-German parents? “A medal at international level,” replies Sprunger, who is now preparing for the next World Athletics Indoor Championships, which will take place in Nanjing (China) in March.

**One of Switzerland's most successful track-and-field athletes, Léa Sprunger – pictured here at the 2019 World Athletics Championships in Doha.** Photo: Keystone

## Noisy neighbours, long hiking trails, dog waste bins

# 49

Switzerland is a nation of tenants – and noisy neighbours. Some 49 per cent of the country's apartment dwellers admit that they get irritated by the racket next door (Homegate survey, 2020). Use of the shared laundry room is the second most common, but more classically Swiss, source of conflict (18 per cent) – as immortalised in the novel “Der Waschküchenschlüssel” (The laundry room key); Hugo Loetscher, 1998, Diogenes Verlag.

# 65 000

Annoyed by the neighbours? Go hiking. More and more people have been discovering the delights of Switzerland's 65,000-kilometre hiking trail network this year. If the country's entire population were spread out evenly along all these trails in single file, everyone would remain socially distanced seven metres apart.

# 39 600 000

The Swiss tourist board Switzerland Tourism reported record figures for the month of July: 39.6 million overnight stays. Too good to be true? Unfortunately, yes: these are the figures for July 2019. Thanks to COVID-19, the current holiday season may break the wrong sort of records.

# 99

Another coronavirus statistic: 99 per cent of Swiss SMEs and start-ups have been negatively affected by the pandemic, according to the Berne University of Applied Sciences. Eleven per cent say that COVID-19 threatens their very existence.

# 40 000

Finally, some doggy-related business. Robidog – the Swiss-produced dog waste disposal system featuring an in-built waste bag dispenser – was patented in 1981. Around 40,000 of these contraptions can be found all around Switzerland. However, the dog waste bin has become a victim of its own success: its numbers are shrinking, because dog owners have become more conscientious in picking up and disposing of their pooch's mess.



# The OSA and COVID-19

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) was not immune from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now we are working at full speed again towards our goals – driven by a vision for the future.

REMO GYSIN, OSA PRESIDENT

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused much anguish around the world. Infections, deaths, business closures, and unemployment are now part and parcel of daily news reports. Over 770,000 Swiss live abroad in all continents, calling more than 100 different countries their home. The OSA, which represents the Swiss diaspora’s interests in Switzerland, cannot say for sure how many Swiss Abroad have been affected by the pandemic in one way or another. But we know just how important the work of our support network is in the current situation.

COVID-19 also had consequences at our administrative office in Berne as well as within the OSA Executive Board and the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA). We had to postpone our annual congress as well as numerous meetings. Winter and summer camps for young people were cancelled. In Berne, we introduced homeworking and then short-

time working. This helped to prevent possible contagion as well as job losses. In short, the OSA responded to the situation and addressed the in-house challenges posed by the pandemic.

We also had to improvise. For example, the first-ever virtual CSA meeting took place on 10 July, featuring participation from over 80 delegates in Asia, Europe, North and South America, and Oceania. This information and discussion platform saw Lucas Metzger (Binningen, canton of Basel-Landschaft) elected as the new treasurer, while a statement rejecting the SVP’s limitation initiative was also formulated at the meeting. Everything about the video call went to plan. Maybe this new experience will lead to a different way of doing things in future, involving less travelling but more regular interaction among delegates.

## Our goals have not changed

The OSA administrative office is currently a hive of activity. Many of our annual objectives have already been met. Our major initiative aimed at merging the three existing websites ([www.revue.ch](http://www.revue.ch), [www.aso.ch](http://www.aso.ch), [www.swisscommunity.org](http://www.swisscommunity.org)) into a single new website ([www.swisscommunity.org](http://www.swisscommunity.org)) is also making good progress. This project should be completed by spring 2021.

Not all current difficulties are down to the pandemic. The sudden unavailability of e-voting and the – to put it diplomatically – lukewarm attitude of the big banks towards the Swiss Abroad are attributable to other factors. These ongoing sagas need to end. We are still doing all we can to make that happen.

## Visions for the future

After a difficult few months, we have formulated a mission that stakes out the direction of travel and offers impetus for the future. Here are my visions for the OSA:

- All Swiss Abroad eligible to vote will be able to participate in elections and popular votes in Switzerland. Their constitutional political rights will be protected.
- Swiss banks and insurance companies will also offer their services to the Swiss Abroad on satisfactory terms comparable to those offered to the Swiss in Switzerland.
- The CSA will finally have a representative composition, with delegates elected directly via e-voting.
- The number of Swiss expatriate associations will increase worldwide, with greater representation among all age groups.
- The OSA Executive Board and the CSA will be headed by a female president for the first time.

## Thank you, Peter!

Peter Wüthrich retired from the Executive Board of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) on 30 June 2020, after having fought the corner of the Swiss Abroad with great passion and energy for over 20 years.



Following his first tenure from 1988 to 2008, we were delighted when Peter took up the challenging position of treasurer for a second time in 2017. In this role, Peter provided the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), the OSA Executive Board, and the OSA administrative office with expert advice on financial matters and much more besides.

His sound legal knowledge was also of great help to us. Peter’s tremendous professional expertise enabled him to act as our in-house ‘firefighter’ who was able to solve problems and provide practical tips. Famously, he even assisted us a number of times from his sailing trips in the Mediterranean – truly above and beyond the call of duty.

On behalf of the Swiss Abroad and all CSA delegates and OSA Executive Board members, I would like to thank Peter for his wonderful, unflinching service. It was a pleasure to work with him. We will always treasure fond memories of his time.

All the best on your retirement, Peter. We wish you good health, favourable winds at sea, and every happiness for the future.

**Remo Gysin**

President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA)

# A story of integration

Educatiosuisse provides advice to young Swiss Abroad who come to Switzerland to further their education. Raquel Weidmann is one such expatriate. She talked to us about her experiences after arriving in Switzerland.

“My grandparents emigrated many years ago from the Zurich Oberland to Argentina. Consequently, my father grew up in a Swiss colony. Together with my mother, my family later settled in Puerto Rico Misiones. I was born in 1995, the youngest of two sisters. Our parents told us that going to school was very important. For my six years of secondary school education, I moved 45 kilometres away to attend the Instituto Linea Cuchilla school in my father’s home village of Ruiz de Montoya. In addition to classroom learning, we always did lots of practical work during my time there.

The opportunity to come to Switzerland presented itself after I finished school. My parents’ former neighbours, who had remigrated from Argentina to Switzerland, offered to let me live with them. I therefore decided to move to Switzerland without any knowledge of the language or culture.

I had great expectations of what awaited me, but quickly realised that things would not necessarily be so easy. At the beginning I found it hard to accept that my good school qualifications counted for little in Switzerland. The culture and the language were new to me, the world of work even more so. My parents had always impressed on us the importance of getting a university degree that would

stand us in good stead for the future. It was in Switzerland that I learned that doing an apprenticeship was a viable alternative. Starting from square one was not what I had planned, but that is exactly what I did. During my integration year, I picked up the language and learned a lot about Swiss culture and the work environment. My teachers were very helpful and committed to each and every student. Time in the classroom was supplemented by weekly one-day work placements in various professional settings. The integration year was very useful, and I am grateful that Switzerland offers it as an option.

I got to know my current employer during a trial traineeship. I did an internship in my first year, followed by a three-year apprenticeship as a childcare specialist – which I finished in summer 2019. Not only do I still work as a childcare specialist at the nursery school that took me on as an intern, but I am also preparing to study as a social education worker. This two-year course will take place at the Ago-gis training centre in Olten, culminating in a Federal Diploma HF (College of Higher Education).

I would not have been able to do vocational training without the support of educatiosuisse and a scholarship from my home canton of Zurich.



**I very much appreciated the individual advice and assistance that I received from educatiosuisse.” (RG)**

Raquel Weidmann  
Photo provided

Testimonies from young Swiss Abroad are regularly published on the educatiosuisse Facebook page and at [www.educatiosuisse.ch](http://www.educatiosuisse.ch).

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# Can I make retroactive OASI payments after returning to Switzerland?

*Question: "I have been living in Japan over the last few years and have not made any payments into the old-age and survivors' insurance scheme (OASI) during this time. Is it possible to make retroactive payments for these missing years once I return to Switzerland?"*

**Answer:** Unfortunately, you cannot make retroactive payments for the years you missed while you were abroad. You have the option of making retroactive payments dating back up to five years, but only if you were subject to OASI contributions (i.e. essentially domiciled in Switzerland) during that period.

Barring certain exceptions, people living abroad are not subject to OASI contributions and therefore cannot make retroactive payments for the years that they miss. We therefore recommend that you contact your cantonal compensation office for further details before leaving Switzerland. It is also worth making prior arrangements to accrue pension assets – either by taking out voluntary OASI with the Swiss Compensation Office in Geneva (see [www.zas.admin.ch](http://www.zas.admin.ch) > Swiss Compensation Office SCO) or by taking out private insurance.

This information does not apply to people who return to Switzerland after being domiciled in an EU/EFTA country. Anyone living in the EU/EFTA will have been covered by social security in their host country and therefore cannot make any retroactive OASI payments.

OSA LEGAL DEPARTMENT

The OSA's Legal Service provides general legal information on Swiss law, particularly in areas which concern the Swiss Abroad. It does not provide information on foreign law or intervene in disputes between private parties.

Gerda Brunner and a group of other children from the "Fifth Switzerland" on holiday in Switzerland in July 1937  
Photo: FYSA archive



Memories of the 1942 camp – young Swiss Abroad trying their hand at winter sports in Engelberg  
Photo: newspaper cutting

## Lasting memories

Have you ever been at a camp for young Swiss Abroad? If so, we invite you to share your fondest memories with us.

Unfortunately, all the camps for young Swiss Abroad have had to be postponed this year. We have therefore decided to take a trip down memory lane before welcoming young people from the "Fifth Switzerland" to their native country for more unforgettable experiences in 2021. We are currently sifting through the archive and choosing the best images from our photo collection – as we look forward to many more great camps in future.

Pictures and memories have enduring value. If you or a member of your family have already been on a camp run by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) or the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA), then you will probably have your own photos and reminiscences. We invite you to share with us your memories of the

best, funniest and most moving moments. Maybe there are anecdotes and experiences that you particularly remember from your time at one of our camps. And if you have any good photos, please share them with us too. We hope to post a selection of photos from past camps on social media (our camps date back as far as the 1930s). In addition, we intend to publish the best camp-related stories in anonymised form as part of a dedicated series in the OSA newsletter and on the [www.aso.ch](http://www.aso.ch) and [www.sjas.ch](http://www.sjas.ch) websites.

Please send your photos and anecdotes to [memories@aso.ch](mailto:memories@aso.ch) or [memories@sjas.ch](mailto:memories@sjas.ch). If you would also kindly indicate the year and location to which they refer, it will help us to place them in context. (MB/LR)

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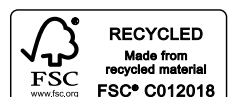
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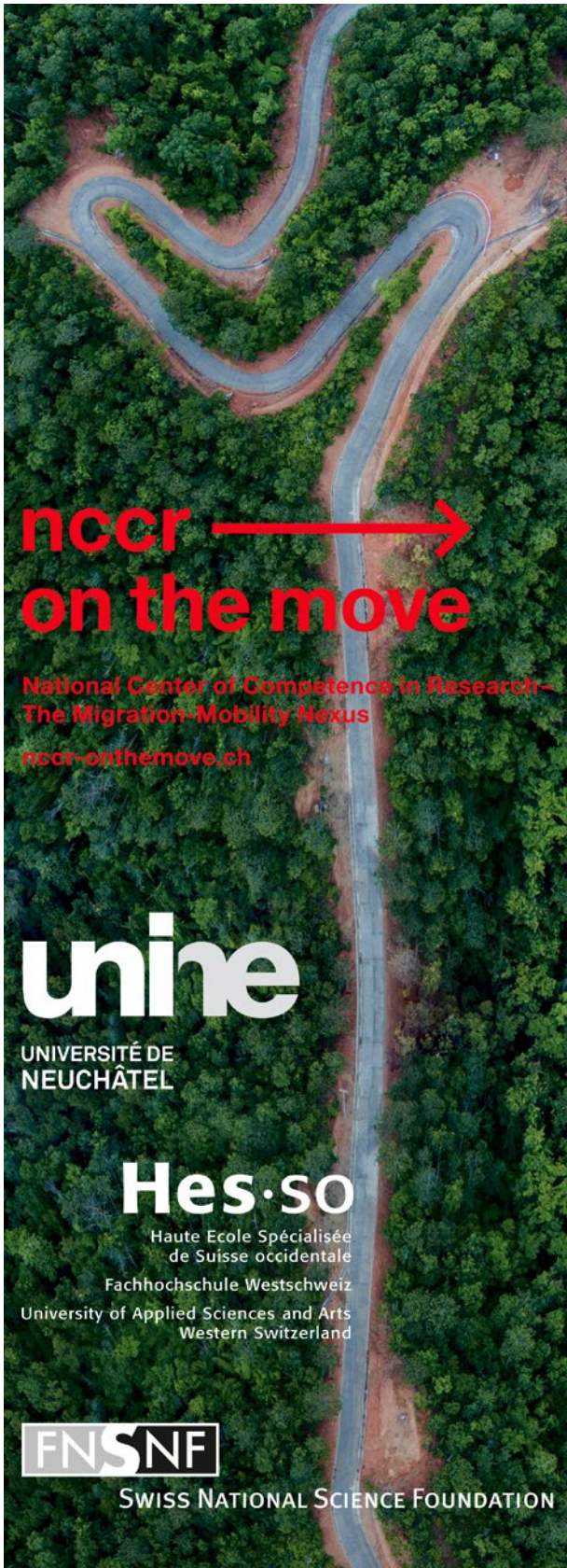
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## A questionnaire on the retirement plans of the Swiss Abroad

What are your plans for retirement? Or, if you are already retired, where do you live and why? The University of Neuchâtel and the Geneva School of Social Work would like to learn about your experiences.

This autumn, a strictly confidential questionnaire will be sent by post to 10,000 Swiss Abroad all around the world, aged 55 or over. In a world where people with Swiss nationality are increasingly choosing to live elsewhere than Switzerland, the aim of this research is to better understand such developments; to see the positive factors of this life choice, but also any attendant difficulties. Another aim is to understand the links that remain with Switzerland, if any, and to learn about any related movement.

Participation in this voluntary survey is of great importance for the success of the research project. The Swiss Abroad, aged 55 years or older, who will receive the questionnaire have been chosen at random by the Federal Statistical Office. Those selected are representative of a great number of people who share the same characteristics: the same age, or the same place of residence, for example. As such, it is important that a large proportion of the people contacted participate in the survey, so that the results are as representative as possible. The research team will be delighted to receive all your reactions and replies!

The data collected from the survey will be made anonymous. This means that the names and addresses of those involved will not be made available to the research team. It will therefore not be possible to use the data to identify any respondents.

This research is being carried out by the University of Neuchâtel and the Geneva School of Social Work, within the framework of the National Centre of Competence in Research nccr – on the move project, which is dedicated to studying migration and mobility. It is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. This study is being conducted with the support of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

(HET-SO)

Contact: you can find more information about this project on the website [ogy.de/en-nccr](http://ogy.de/en-nccr) or via the project email address: [tasurvey@nccr-onthemove.ch](mailto:tasurvey@nccr-onthemove.ch)

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## Federal votes

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

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

On 1 July 2020, the Federal Council determined the proposals that are to be put to voters on 29 November 2020 (see [ogy.de/medienmitteilung-juli](http://ogy.de/medienmitteilung-juli)):

- Federal Popular Initiative "For responsible businesses – protecting human rights and the environment";
- Federal Popular Initiative "For a ban on financing war material manufacturers".

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

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Accra (2020)

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## Three fathers – how did that happen?



NANDO VON ARB:  
"Drei Väter" (Three fathers)  
Edition Moderne, Zurich 2019  
304 pages;  
CHF 49 or approx. EUR 39

The story of a boy called Nando – told in graphic-novel format from the protagonist's own viewpoint – provides the answer to this question. Nando's natural father leaves Nando's mother while the boy is still very young. He is no longer there to take care of Nando and his two sisters. Nando's mother, now alone, is a loving parent to her children. But she soon finds it hard to cope, not least because money is tight.

The sprightly Kiko, father of one of Nando's sisters, often takes care of the children. He likes putting silly ideas into their heads. Nando would marry his mother if he could, because he feels she needs someone by her

side. As that isn't possible, he begins searching for someone else who would be suitable. Gentle giant Zelo appears to fit the bill with his reassuringly broad-shouldered appearance. Some time later, Nando's biological father begins to show an interest in his son again, taking him to museums and outings in his car. The three men are essentially the father figures of Nando's childhood.

Nando von Arb's debut novel earned him 10,000 francs as the winner of the 2020 Swiss Children's and Youth Book Award. The book not only appeals to older children and teenagers, but to adults too. Von Arb's jagged black-and-white drawings, interspersed with splashes of colour, are an imaginative take on the author's own childhood in a patchwork family. The protagonists are fantasy-like but precisely characterised. Nando's mother is a big bird with affectionate eyes and big protective wings. His father, on the other hand, is a sly fox. Nando looks like a large egg with a black cap, and is extremely endearing. The blurred lines between fantasy and reality lend a wonderful lightness to the occasionally melancholy storyline. It is an extremely expressive comic-strip novel – sensitive in its handling of Nando's childhood, yet neither accusatory nor judgemental in tone.

Nando von Arb was born in 1992 in Zurich. After training as a graphic designer, von Arb studied at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, where he graduated in Illustration Fiction in 2018. He is currently doing a Master of Fine Arts in Ghent. Von Arb can be found on Instagram at @nandovonarb.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

## Electro-pop stalwarts play it safe



YELLO –  
"Point". Universal Music, 2020

Yello are a veritable institution – and both members of the duo have well-established, clearly delineated roles. The process of making a new album begins with Boris Blank tinkering with new sounds in his studio. This can take months or sometimes even years. It is over to Dieter Meier once the music has a fixed structure. Meier takes the material and travels to the other side of the world to write the lyrics. Yello work in stages, not together. It always seems to have been like this. You could also say that their artistic output has barely changed over the past 42 years.

Their new studio album "Point" cements this impression. For example, opener "Waba Duba"

immediately revisits the past with its signature skittish tribal loop. Blank's synthesiser rhythms sound vaguely like baritone saxophones – another Yello affectation. Mix in the odd vocal sample, and what we have is instantly reminiscent of the epochal electro track "Bostich" (1981) or international hit "The Race" (1988). The only difference is that Dieter Meier's own voice sounds quite unfamiliar, for once lacking its inimitable breathy whisper and mellow depth.

"Point" contains most of the usual fare, even if Blank's computer seems to have pimped the beats somewhat. It is an album with that customary sense of fun and effortlessness, sometimes zany but hardly ever absurd, and always slightly sterile and intellectual – typical Yello, in fact.

Are the duo simply sticking to their guns, or is this self-plagiarism? Whichever way you look at it, Yello's reassuringly accomplished "sameness" comes as no surprise. Nevertheless, the danceable electronic mid-tempo number "Way Down" proves that Blank and Meier can mix things up when they want. Barely recognisable as a Yello song, the track actually contains something sounding like genuine lead vocals. "Big Boy's Blues" is another departure – a big, brash track with banging drums and edgy guitar samples. You could almost call it rock and roll.

While these exceptions constitute the album's highlights, most of the 12 songs have a familiar air about them. The duo have recycled themselves and, for the most part, are no longer up to speed with the times. This is unlikely to concern their loyal fanbase. Yello are unlikely to attract many new followers with their latest effort either.

MARKO LEHTINEN

# Petra Gössi



Is she up to the job? When Petra Gössi was elected leader of the Liberals (FDP) in 2016, few people knew the then 40-year-old lawyer from the canton of Schwyz. Although she had been a member of the National Council for five years, Gössi had never marked herself out as a political heavyweight. This soon changed. In 2017, Gössi skilfully saw to it that the FDP faction leader and man sitting next to her in parliament, Ignazio Cassis, was elected to the Federal Council. Climate change then became an issue, driving tens of thousands of mainly young dissatisfied people on to Switzerland's streets. Their ire was partly directed at the FDP, which, together with the SVP, had watered down the proposed revision of the CO<sup>2</sup> Act in 2018. By the time election year came around, Switzerland's "business party" had run into a headwind. There was disgruntlement among an element of grassroots voters too. The party leader responded by pulling off a spectacular ideological volte-face. Suddenly, incentives such as a CO<sup>2</sup> tax on airline tickets were no longer taboo. The rank and file voiced support for their leader's U-turn, a survey of party members allowing Gössi to silence critics within the party who had accused her of opportunism in the wake of this policy reversal. The FDP consequently emerged relatively unscathed from last autumn's federal elections, despite the green landslide. Although the party lost more than one per cent, pre-election forecasts had suggested worse. Gössi is now firmly in charge, with party members having recently voted her in for another two years as FDP leader. She is one of Switzerland's longest-serving party leaders currently in office. The sceptics fell silent quite some time ago. Gössi is indeed up to the job.

THEODORA PETER

## Attorney General of Switzerland Michael Lauber stands down

Amid growing political pressure, Switzerland's chief prosecutor, Attorney General Michael Lauber has resigned and is due to leave his post at the end of the year. Lauber has been accused of serious misconduct, having had a secret meeting with FIFA president Gianni Infantino despite the fact that he was investigating football's governing body at the time. Lauber's resignation is not the end of the matter. Impeachment proceedings against the Attorney General are still ongoing, while Swiss prosecutors opened a criminal investigation into Infantino in July. (MUL)

## More emigration than immigration

Immigration from the EU is a major issue in Swiss politics. However, emigration from Switzerland outstripped immigration from abroad in the second quarter of 2020. There are two main reasons for this: the relative deterioration of the Swiss economy, and restrictions on people entering the country due to the pandemic. (MUL)

## Crypto – federal prosecutors open criminal probe

For decades, Swiss company Crypto AG manufactured encryption devices that helped foreign intelligence services to snoop on other countries (see "Swiss Review" 3/2020). By allowing the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland to investigate, the Federal Council has now paved the way for criminal proceedings. The government can block any criminal proceedings that it believes would seriously jeopardise Switzerland's interests. Evidently, it has concluded that investigating Crypto poses no such threat. (MUL)

## Crypto – successor company in trouble

Crypto AG has been defunct for years. Now successor company Crypto International AG (based in Zug) is also in trouble, having had to lay off 80 of its 82 staff this summer. This is mainly because Crypto International is currently banned from exporting its encryption devices. (MUL)

## COVID-19 scuppers popular initiative

The "e-voting moratorium" popular initiative is now off the agenda. Its supporters have abandoned their attempt to collect the necessary signatures. According to the initiative committee, which includes the National Councillors Franz Grüter (SVP) and Balthasar Glättli (Greens), collecting 100,000 signatures in time was looking increasingly impossible. Social distancing and hygiene measures had complicated the exercise. (MUL)

More news at [www.revue.ch](http://www.revue.ch)

# I need to see the wide blue yonder.

Lugano, Ticino, © Milo Zanicchia



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