


# SWISS REVIEW

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The magazine for the Swiss Abroad  
May 2017



**Still radiant at 40 –  
an interview with Francine Jordi**

**Reform enters the home straight –  
old-age pension of the future**

**Soldiers as far as the eye can see –  
Switzerland's huge panoramic paintings**





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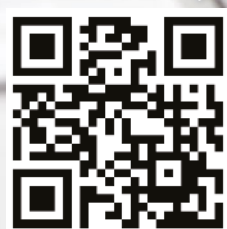
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## A dual identity

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You will notice from my surname that I have foreign roots. Lehtinen is a Finnish name which is as common there as Müller or Meier in Switzerland. I was born in Finland and both my parents come from the southern part of this northern country.

The small things in life often remind me of this. I have lost count of how many times I have had to spell my surname in my lifetime. When asked, I also explain

that the correct pronunciation of Lehtinen is with a soft "h" and not a "kh" sound.

During childhood, it was not just my name that reminded me that I am not actually Swiss. I can vividly recall being the only person dressed as a cowboy at the Basel carnival, which was sacrilege as far as the locals were concerned. I was also the worst skier in my group of friends as a child. On the playground I would occasionally hear the words: "Die spinnen, die Finnen!" (The Finns are crazy).

My parents once told me that they had lost their language and therefore part of their identity by living abroad – they were quite literally "lost for words". Their Finnish became rusty as the years went by and they never perfected German either. This is less of a problem for me. I arrived in Switzerland at such a young age that nobody detects any Finnish accent. I speak German perfectly and Finnish well.

However, what I can empathise with is the feeling of inner conflict and a life between two places. You feel like a foreigner in your old home country but also in the new one. Many people still consider me Finnish despite the fact I am completely integrated and hold a Swiss passport. "You don't say much up there, do you?" "You're bound to be a big drinker!" And whenever I visit my old homeland, I am always considered Swiss. Of course, I have a big bank account and never talk to anyone about it!

When I was young I felt as though I did not have a native country. Today, I see things differently – I have two, not none. This is also a blessing rather than a curse. My two identities have widened my horizons and made me more open-minded and flexible. I can see the bigger picture from two perspectives today and feel an equal bond with both countries.

MARKO LEHTINEN, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cover photo:  
The singer and presenter Francine Jordi.  
Photo: Thomas Buchwalder



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## Immigration policy – a never-ending story



Most Europeans have nothing against the immigration of specialist workers who are required and at least accept our culture. However, they should be specialists who are genuinely needed and not economic migrants. This should not

result in the importation of problems. Politicians in Brussels and Berne are unfortunately completely out of touch with reality on this issue. The whole of Europe needs a storm to clear the air, and it will come as the pendulum always swings back at some point.

STEPHAN BERNHARD, COLOMBIA

It is time we opened our eyes to see things as they really are. Centuries of exploiting so-called developing countries has created the current situation. This must be rectified if we hope to stop mass immigration. The issue is not Islamisation but rather poverty and wealth and how it is distributed. Yet we have a blinkered outlook and believe we can preserve our “kind” by isolating ourselves. This is a short-sighted approach because if nothing changes for the world’s poor, they will continue to storm fortress Europe. These people are desperate and prepared to risk their lives on the Mediterranean and pay thousands of euros to smugglers.

JAN DE BAERE, GERMANY

By failing to implement the mass immigration initiative, the Swiss Parliament sold out the Swiss people and betrayed democracy. The blame lies with the Europhiles in Parliament who gleefully welcome the EU and when faced with a threat kowtow.

JÜRIG SCHWENDENER, THAILAND

Over a long period of history, we Swiss have built a consensus to establish a federal and democratic state that is tolerant, respects the particular traits of its people and is valued, supported and, when necessary, defended reciprocally by every section of its population as its guarantor. Immigrants who firmly believe in this consensus become Swiss in spirit regardless of where they come from. Who could have anything against that? What irritates lots of people, however, is the gravy train that many immigrants unfortunately wish to ride. They pursue a goal that is completely alien to the Swiss consensus.

WOLFGANG WITTENBURG, CANADA

## Professional drones – cutting-edge Swiss technology

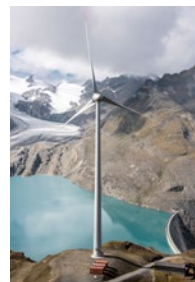


While enjoying a quiet picnic in a remote area in the Swiss Alps, a very loud and obnoxious drone buzzed and hovered directly over us, just a few feet away, for 15 minutes. This intrusion was blatantly invasive and disrespectful of our privacy and solitude. We felt as if we were being spied on, and despite shouting and even throwing cow manure at it, it persisted, as if taunting

us. Too bad, the invasion of personal privacy through drones is not mentioned in your article. Not everyone appreciates their obnoxious presence in our immediate vicinity.

MARINA WEATHERLY, SWITZERLAND

## 2050 energy strategy – which are the right resources?



I am disappointed to observe that the discussions on clean energy for Switzerland and other countries do not mention the progress made in Cold Fusion, which is being researched and promoted by most advanced societies. It’s better known under the abbreviation: LENR, for low energy nuclear reaction, of which the Rossi Effect has shown a COP of about 200, so efficient,

that this new type of energy will in the next decade make all other methods obsolete!

CARL COMETTA, USA

## Swissness – the crux of the new law

This is great! And now to ensure “Swissness” completely, let us add that at least 51 percent of the board of directors in firms must be Swiss as well. You can increase your board in numbers to get to the right proportions... Hopp Schwyz, reach for the stars!

KATI LYON-VILLIGER, CANADA

If a Swissness law has entered into force then the name “Swiss” and the Swiss cross should be removed from the planes of the Lufthansa subsidiary. We don’t need this airline’s poor image.

PETER KÜDERLI, SWITZERLAND



# The battle over major pension reform

Two deeply divided camps face off over sweeping reform of the old-age pension. If the bill fails to win support at referendum in the autumn, the first and second pillars face difficulties.

MARKUS BROTSCHI

The National Council and Council of States have been wrangling for two and a half years over the reform of old-age and survivors' insurance (AHV) and occupational pension (BVG). They have been entrenched in their positions over key points for so long that a conference of conciliation between the two chambers was called last March.

The dispute centres on the seemingly insignificant issue of whether or not future pensioners should receive 70 Swiss francs more a month in AHV benefits. The comprehensive reform of AHV and the second pillar was finally passed by Parliament in March by the narrowest of majorities. In the National Council vote, the centre-left camp – made up of the Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP), the Greens, the Swiss Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP) and the Swiss Conservative Democratic Party (BDP) – managed to secure the exact majority required of 101 votes for the pension increase. The support of the two Lega MPs and the seven Green Liberals ultimately got them over the line. The latter reluctantly approved the reform despite disagreeing with the pension increase. The Lega MPs, who are part of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) parliamentary group, took the liberty of invoking their movement's social policy programme which calls for an enhancement of AHV.

Social Affairs Minister Alain Berset (SP) now has the opportunity to go down in history as the Federal Councillor to bring about the first AHV reform since the 1990s while at the same time putting the second pillar on a more solid footing by lowering the conversion rate which determines the level of pension. In 2010, 72% of the electorate rejected

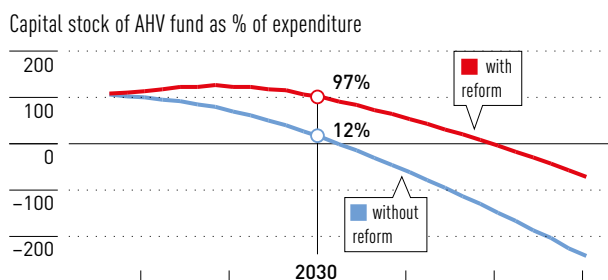


Federal Councillor Alain Berset could soon clinch "his" pension reform.

Photo: Keystone

a conversion rate reduction. Berset has therefore pinned his hopes on a comprehensive and simultaneous reform of both pillars having a better chance of gaining the support of the Swiss people. The SP Federal Councillor from Fribourg is nevertheless not yet home and dry with his major initiative. On 24 September, the Swiss people and the can-

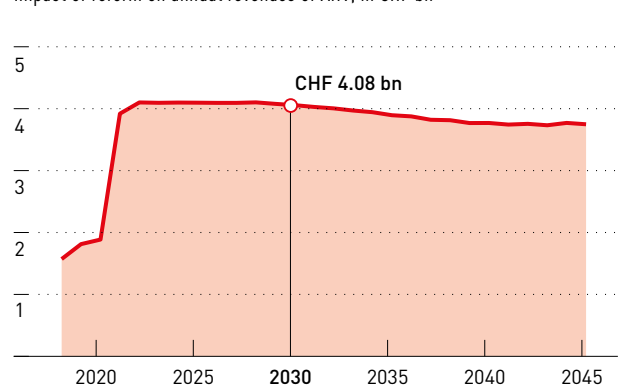
## Forecast for the financial development of the first pillar



Capital of AHV fund, in CHF bn

	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045
with reform	49	62	59	35	-4	-61
without reform	44	35	7	-43	-111	-198

## Impact of reform on annual revenues of AHV, in CHF bn



Graphic: "Tages-Anzeiger", Micha Treuthardt Gann / source: FSO

tons will decide on the increase to VAT which is linked to the bill. If voters reject the additional funding for AHV, the entire reform of the first and second pillars will fail.

## Historic stress test for AHV

There is agreement on the need to renew the social institutions right across the political spectrum. The last AHV reform to successfully pass a referendum was that of the SP Federal Councillor Ruth Dreifuss in 1995. The number of pensioners and life expectancy have since increased further. AHV – Switzerland’s main social institution – is facing an historic stress test. The baby-boomer generation will enter retirement over the next 15 years. Around 6.5 people in employment financed one person of pension age when AHV was introduced in 1948, 3.4 working people cover the costs for one pensioner today and in 20 years from now the ratio will stand at 2 to 1. From the beginning of the next decade, AHV will have deficits running into billions each year and the AHV capital will be used up by 2030 unless the insurance scheme receives additional funding or relief through cost-cutting measures.

The proposed reform provides for both. The pension age for women is to be brought into line with that for men and raised to 65 years of age. AHV will also obtain additional annual income of around CHF 2 billion. In the second pillar, pension benefits will be brought into line with increased life expectancy. The conversion rate, which determines the pension amount, will be lowered. This will result in a 12 % reduction in pensions. However, Parliament has learned from the failed referendum on the conversion rate and agreed compensatory measures. But it is this issue of pension compensation that lies right at the heart of the dispute between the centre-left and the centre-right. The National Council majority – made up of the Free Democratic Party (FDP), Green Liberals (GLP) and SVP – wanted to completely make up for the pension reduction through higher savings contributions in the second pillar. However, the centre-left alliance ultimately triumphed. Under their proposal, future pensioners will receive an additional CHF 70 a month in AHV benefits and retired married couples will get a higher maximum pension.

## The disadvantage of such a narrow majority

The wafer-thin parliamentary majority is not a good starting point for securing majority support from the electorate for pension reform. The rather unusual alliance of CVP, SP and the trade unions argues that it is a well-balanced bill

## The key changes to old-age pension 2020

- The pension age for women will increase by three months each year from 2018. From 2021, women will not receive a full pension until the age of 65.
- The pension age will be made flexible. The reference age is 65, from which entitlement exists to a full pension from the first and second pillars. However, there is now the option of working beyond the official retirement age of 65 and increasing the pension to the maximum level with the AHV contributions. AHV contribution gaps can now also be made up, which was not previously possible.
- AHV will receive additional funding: From 2018, the revenues from 0.3 percentage points of VAT will go to the AHV fund. An increase in VAT is not required for this as it concerns tax revenues that previously went to invalidity insurance. VAT will then be increased by 0.3 percentage points in 2021 to further shore up AHV.
- People retiring from 2019 will receive extra AHV of CHF 70. The rise will increase the maximum AHV pension from CHF 2,350 today to CHF 2,420. Married couples can expect an increase of up to CHF 226 a month. This is due to the fact that the maximum pension for married couples will be 155 % of the maximum single pension in future. The pension increases should make up for some of the losses in the second pillar.
- The increase in AHV pensions will be financed with an additional 0.3 percentage of wages, half of which will be contributed by employers and half by employees. However, this funding will only be sufficient until around 2030.
- From 2019, the conversion rate will gradually be reduced from 6.8 % to 6 % for the mandatory occupational pension. This means that for CHF 100,000 of retirement assets, CHF 6,000 in annual pension will now be paid out instead of CHF 6,800 previously. However, the losses will partially be offset by a reduction in the coordination deduction. Pension scheme contributions will have to be paid on a higher proportion of salary in future. This means more capital will be saved.
- A 20-year transitional generation will also be given a pension guarantee. Everyone aged 45 and over when the reform enters into force will receive a pension at the conversion rate of 6.8 % in the mandatory part of the occupational pension. However, 85 % of those insured have a pension fund with non-mandatory benefits provision which is why only a minority will effectively benefit from the pension guarantee.

which maintains the level of pensions while also putting the social institutions on a solid financial footing until 2030. The FDP, SVP, employer and trade associations, on the other hand, believe the increase in the AHV pension is irresponsible in view of the demographic trend. Future generations would have to pick up the bill. The pension increase would more than eat up the savings from increasing the pension

**Will women soon have to work for longer? The reform provides for an increase in the pension age for women to 65 years of age.**

Photo: Keystone



age for women. Opponents are also seeking to exploit the fact that existing pension recipients will come away empty-handed from the increase in AHV pensions. They are trying to score points with the catchphrase “two-class society” made up of the better-off future pensioners and the existing ones.

The left is not completely united over the pension reform either. In particular, the trade unions in French-speaking Switzerland reject the increase in the pension age for women. Some female trade unionists are even calling for a significant increase in pensions for women to make up for the gender pay gap on the labour market. However, the leaders of the SP and the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions are seeking to persuade their support base with the argument that the left has managed to wrangle a substantial increase in AHV pensions out of the conservatives for the first time in decades.

### Chance of reform remains

There is still a chance of securing approval for the reform at the ballot box. It is doubtful whether the FDP, SVP and business associations can form a strong enough opposition. Some FDP MPs in particular will find it hard to encourage the public to vote no. After all, if the reform should fail, it will be difficult to pass the required measures quickly enough to prevent AHV running up a deficit in view of the entrenched positions. The Swiss Trade Association cannot unanimously come out against the

proposal because individual members, such as the Gastrosuisse and Hotelleriesuisse sector associations, support the reform. Some employer associations in French-speaking Switzerland also back the reform. It remains to be seen whether the SVP will go all out to thwart the bill as their supporters are often closer to left-wing positions on old-age pension than the hardline restructuring approach of their own party. The SVP party base played a significant role in ensuring that the reduction of the conversion rate failed at referendum in 2010.

The SVP is nevertheless now fighting alongside the FDP in Parliament for a bill that not only increases the pension age for women but also paves the way for setting the retirement age at 67. If the bill fails, the FDP and SVP will attempt to restructure the social institutions step-by-step. They will focus on increasing the pension age for women and a small rise in VAT. The conversion rate would then be reduced in a second bill with compensatory measures in the second pillar. As a third step, the right-wing parties will try to push through an increase in the retirement age to 67.

### Concocted in a small group

On the other hand, a yes from the Swiss people and cantons would provide confirmation for the architects of the reform that the majority support of the Swiss people can only be secured if social equilibrium is provided for as well as austerity measures. An AHV increase of CHF 70 and the rais-



ing of the ceiling for the pension of married couples constitute such equilibrium. This plan was concocted on the Council of States' Social Affairs Committee made up of Urs Schwaller (CVP, FR), Christine Egerszegi (FDP, AG), Verena Diener (GLP, ZH) and Paul Rechsteiner (SP, SG). This centre-left alliance got the compromise pension proposal through the Council of States in September 2015, shortly before the parliamentary elections. But three of its four architects did not stand again at the elections in October 2015. Only trade union leader Rechsteiner remained in office. This has made the debate in the National Council more difficult.

The fact that four veterans from the smaller chamber had concocted a pension reform between them which they saw as the final compromise was regarded by the larger chamber as a provocative step. The National Council, which shifted to the right at the election in October 2015, did not want to be presented with a done deal on one of the most significant reforms of recent decades.

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MARKUS BROTSCHI IS THE FEDERAL POLITICAL AFFAIRS EDITOR FOR THE "TAGES-ANZEIGER" AND "DER BUND"

## What does the reform mean for the Swiss Abroad?

The Swiss Abroad with AHV insurance will also benefit from the CHF 70 increase in pensions and the higher benefits for married couples. There are also some changes to AHV in terms of provisions concerning contributions which will have an impact on the Swiss Abroad:

- Children who accompany their parents abroad and are aged under five or who are born abroad can no longer obtain voluntary insurance. However, they can now include the prior insurance period of a parent when they become liable for contributions themselves (when they reach the age of 17 if in gainful employment or when they reach the age of 20 if they are not in gainful employment). Children do not suffer any disadvantages from the change up to this point as they have entitlement to invalidity insurance rehabilitation measures based on the Federal Act on Invalidity Insurance.
- Family members (not in gainful employment) of people who work for federal government abroad and enjoy special rights and immunities (e.g. diplomats) are now automatically insured.
- Employees working abroad for an employer with its head office in Switzerland now only need a prior insurance period of three years instead of five previously.
- People not in gainful employment who accompany their spouses, who have AHV insurance, abroad must now continue the insurance and also provide evidence of three years of prior insurance (previously they were admitted to the insurance scheme without a prior insurance period). Spouses will now be treated equally, and people without a sufficient association with Switzerland will no longer be able to obtain AHV insurance.

- Employees working for private aid organisations heavily subsidised by federal government in a non-contracting state now no longer have mandatory insurance. They can continue the insurance by providing evidence of a three-year prior insurance period.

AHV insurance generally remains voluntary for the Swiss Abroad. If they want AHV insurance, they must have had AHV insurance for at least five consecutive years at the time when they left Switzerland. In cases where insurance is being continued – such as employment with a Swiss employer abroad – a reduced prior insurance period of three years now applies. Contributions do not need to have been made during the prior insurance period. Insured status is nevertheless required. People living in an EU or EFTA state cannot be insured under AHV.

There are no specific changes for the Swiss Abroad under the second pillar. The same changes apply to them as to everyone residing in Switzerland with occupational pension provision. The principle that only income already insured under AHV can be insured in the second pillar continues to apply. The Swiss Abroad can only continue insurance under the second pillar if they also remain insured under AHV or have voluntary AHV insurance. If this is the case, they can either continue the insurance policy with the previous pension fund – providing it offers this – or continue insurance with the occupational pension contingency fund. It is not possible to join a second-pillar scheme abroad after a period of time if such insurance did not previously exist in Switzerland.

# A national breakthrough for undocumented immigrants

In February, the government in Geneva caused a stir by announcing a plan that paves the way for thousands of undocumented immigrants to gain legal status. This policy, which has since been approved by Berne, is already being considered by other cantons.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Pierre Maudet, the FDP cantonal councillor for Geneva, announced the surprise move to the media on 21 February accompanied by a senior official from the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM). The plan, dubbed Papyrus, aims to tackle illegal employment by giving legal status to thousands of undocumented immigrants working in the local economy. There are an estimated 18,000 such people in the canton and 76,000 nationwide. Zurich is home to the highest number of them, at 28,000.

Piloted for two years in strict confidence, the initiative was negotiated between Pierre Maudet and Federal Councillor Simonetta Sommaruga, who is responsible for immigration issues. During this time, Papyrus regularised 590 people by granting them a B permit on humanitarian grounds, renewable annually.

## Offices inundated

The news came as a bombshell to the undocumented immigrants living in Geneva, a canton which has some 30,000 domestic employees. Almost 2,000 people attended an information meeting held by self-help organisations on 26 February. The branches of this collective have opened information offices – at a rate of six a week – to support potential applicants in compiling the necessary paperwork. According to the Support Collective for Undocumented Workers, more than 1,600 people flocked to these offices in just two weeks. “Some of the applicants



Hundreds of illegal immigrants attended an information meeting in February about the Papyrus initiative, organised by trade unions and the associations affiliated with the Support Collective for Undocumented Workers.

Photo: Keystone

fail to meet the requirements, mainly because they haven't spent enough time here or because of debts," says Alain Bolle, the Director of the Protestant Social Centre (CSP). About 30% of requests meet the criteria, he added.

Applicants must prove that they are financially independent, do not receive welfare benefits and have lived in Switzerland for at least ten years (or five if

they have children). The CSP estimates that a single person paying 1,500 Swiss francs for health insurance and an apartment would have to earn at least 2,500 francs.

## Declaring workers

The applications for official status require the workers to name their em-



ployers. The government and trade unions want companies and individuals to put their affairs in order and stop employing workers illegally. This reflects one of the aims of the authorities, namely to clean up the domestic service sector, which is the biggest employer of undocumented workers on the labour market. The unions say they will report to the authorities any employer who sacks workers for applying for regularisation. A study commissioned by the SEM found that one in every two undocumented immigrants in French-speaking Switzerland has an AHV number, compared to just one in five in the German-speaking parts, and almost none in the tourist cantons.

“The idea of granting permits on humanitarian grounds comes in response to a precarious, untenable situation,” says Rémy Kammermann, a CSP lawyer. He says that some people – especially women – are living without any welfare protection and exploited by slum landlords who rent mattresses out at 400 francs a month or, worse still, sexually abuse people who fear expulsion. “These arguments have been met with concern by the government, which does not want lawless areas to develop, thus potentially creating crime hot-beds.”

Former Liberal Cantonal Councillor Martine Brunshawig Graf was present at the unveiling of the Papyrus initiative. In 2005, she proposed a regularisation initiative based, like today’s, on the system of hardship cases as stipulated by the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals. At the time, Christophe Blocher headed the Department of Justice and Police. He chose not to pursue the proposal. “We needed a partner in the federal government. This time it’s Simonetta Sommaruga,” says Brunshawig Graf, who now chairs the Federal Committee against Racism. It should be noted that it is the SEM, not the cantons,

which decides whether or not to grant B permits. “The difference with Papyrus is that Geneva has given itself greater scope for agreeing acceptance criteria,” she says.

The Genevan initiative has not gone unnoticed in Switzerland. But Martine Brunshawig Graf does not draw any conclusions from that: “Not all the cantons are ready to introduce such a system. Proper organisation is required. It’s not enough to get a green light from the federal government,” says the former President of the Cantonal Council. In Geneva, Alain Bolle is confident that “Papyrus will have a knock-on effect.” Rémy Kammermann believes German-speaking parts of Switzerland are reluctant to regularise undocumented immigrants because it is seen as somehow “going against the law” in spite of its legality. “Last year, Zurich granted legal status to only two undocumented immigrants, while many German-speaking cantons regularised nobody,” the lawyer explains. The Department of Security in Zurich refuses to confirm estimates that there are 28,000 undocumented immigrants. It explains its policy by referring to the cantonal directive on hardship cases.

Having been approved by the SEM, does Papyrus effectively create a new law at the national level? That remains to be seen, says the Geneva-based lawyer, who expects a great deal from the analysis of the findings of this pilot study in two years’ time. “If the outcome is positive, it will be harder to roll back,” he says.

## The economic impact

The fact is that thousands of undocumented immigrants from Africa, Latin America and Asia are fulfilling a demand for workers in Switzerland. “If you really wanted to get rid of these people, you would simply have to post police officers at railway stations in the morning and pick up the peo-

ple taking the bus to work as cleaners, nannies and handymen in the towns around Geneva,” Alain Bolle says. Conservative politicians are not opposed to this process. FDP Cantonal Councillor Pierre Maudet has “made a name for himself at national level through the Papyrus initiative, and has done so on a potentially contentious issue”, according to a source close to the politician.

Papyrus has only provoked opposition from one corner: Geneva’s Swiss People’s Party (SVP), which believes the move “sends out a disastrous message”. SVP National Councillors Yves Nidegger and Céline Amaudruz have submitted two motions to the National Council. The first seeks to specify and therefore reduce the exceptions for hardship cases. The second calls for Papyrus to be halted until these specifications have been made. Could these motions cast doubt over the experiment in Geneva? “There is no chance of that happening because it would mean amending the law itself,” says Alain Bolle. He is pleased that Papyrus was kept “under the radar because it might otherwise have been undermined by the SVP”.

## The Papyrus effect reverberates across Basel and in the Jura

At the end of March, the far left in Basel called on the government to define the regularisation criteria more objectively. “We were able to relax these criteria in 2017 to allow them to be applied not only to the sick and to families but also to unmarried individuals,” explains Fabrice Mangold from the Basel office for undocumented immigrants. The collective welcomes the Genevan decision, which is says “shows that the SEM can help cantons seeking to establish a transparent procedure”. Basel-Stadt regularises six or seven undocumented immigrants a year out of a total of about 4,000.

In Jura, which has “only a few dozen illegal immigrants, or several hundred at most”, according to a socialist politician, left-wing parties have submitted a motion to the cantonal parliament calling on government to follow the Papyrus initiative. In Vaud, SolidaritéS demanded that the Cantonal Council contact the SEM to discuss the issue of regularisation. The proposal was rejected by 71 votes to 60.

## “I look to the future”

Francine Jordi, the darling of the Swiss celebrity scene, is turning 40. An interview on setbacks with the “Stadl Show”, work on her new album and her optimistic nature.

BY MARKO LEHTINEN

**Francine Jordi, you celebrate your 40th birthday in June. Do you have any special plans yet for the big day?**

No, I always plan my birthdays close to the time. But I’ll definitely be doing something with my family. I’ve also planned a hike, and anyone who would like to can come.

**You are a woman who always looks young and to whom the years have been kind. How does it feel to suddenly reach 40?**

I don’t see it as a major turning point. I feel good and am grateful that I can still enjoy my life at 40. It hasn’t felt painful so far anyway (she laughs).

**You’re currently working on a new album. Can you tell us anything about that?**

Tommy Mustac, who has been my producer for many years, and I are in the

process of composing new songs and working through material offered to us by outside composers. We write lots of lyrics and melodies ourselves but also use songs by other people on my albums. The management company receives around 200 offers every time we start work on a new CD.

**How do you select the “right” songs?**

I rely entirely on gut instinct. Do I really want to sing this song? Are the lyrics suited to a mood that I can and wish to produce? It has to be 100% right.

**Do you like working in the studio?**

It is different to on stage. I stand in front of huge crowds at concerts whereas working in the studio is a bit more intimate. I enjoy both and find the contrast exciting.

**You began your career as a singer almost 20 years ago, while you have made the headlines more as a TV presenter in recent years. There have also been some difficult moments, such as when the international “Stadl Show” which you presented was pulled. With the benefit of hindsight what went wrong there?**

It is hard to say. For the concept of a programme to work, the interplay between lots of elements has to succeed and it is sometimes impossible to pinpoint a specific reason or error that explains why a show is not so well received. The team behind the “Stadl Show” is the same one that is now producing the “Silvesterstadl” with me for the third time. That is still going and has gone down much better than the “Stadl Show”.

**Yes, the “Silvesterstadl” got good reviews last year. And you’ll be presenting it alongside Jörg Pilawa again. Does that compensate for the fact the “Stadl Show” flopped?**

Compensation is not the right word. The fact that the “Stadl Show” didn’t work was not primarily attributed to me. That’s why I never took it personally. I would prefer to say that I’m really looking forward to the next New Year’s Eve show. We had a tremendous amount of fun last time with the team and Jörg Pilawa. The atmosphere was fantastic. I also believe the format is important. You have to understand that there are no longer any big platforms on television for folk music.

**You are surrounded by German colleagues on these shows. Do you think you’re taken seriously as a Swiss presenter? Or are you sometimes mocked?**

Mocked? Quite the opposite. I think my German colleagues were quite surprised at how fast I spoke and how much spirit a Swiss lady can show (she laughs). I feel very comfortable in that environment and get the impression that Swiss presenters are generally highly regarded in Germany and Austria.

**Do you notice any difference in the way you and your German colleagues present shows?**

No, I don’t believe there is a typically German or Swiss way of presenting despite the different mentalities. It depends very much on the individual. Jörg Pilawa, who has a relaxed and light-hearted style, is very different to

Francine Jordi – born on 24 June 1977 in Richigen near Worb – began her career as a folk music singer. She won the “Grand Prix of Folk Music” for Switzerland in 1998 with the track “Das Feuer der Sehnsucht” the first time she entered the competition. A further milestone was her appearance at the Eurovision Song Contest in 2002 with the song “Dans le jardin de mon âme”. She later changed her style of music from folk to pop. Francine Jordi was awarded the Prix Walo – the Swiss easy listening music prize – six times between 1998 and 2006. Her CDs have gone gold seven times and platinum five times. The most recent studio album called “Wir” – which was her 14th – was released in 2015. It climbed to number 3 in the Swiss charts and number 6 in Austria.

Alongside her singing career, Francine Jordi has also been making a name for herself as a presenter for over 10 years. She has appeared on Swiss television alongside Bernard Thurnheer and Sven Epiney as well as on her own shows. She presented the “Stadl Show” on German, Swiss and Austrian television with Alexander Mazza and the “Silvesterstadl” with Jörg Pilawa.





Johannes B. Kerner, who comes across as rather serious and matter-of-fact. Thomas Gottschalk is entirely different again.

**Let's go back to last year again – after the “Stadl Show” was pulled, your programme “Nur für Dich” on Swiss television did not really work either. It was taken off air after four episodes. Hand on heart, was there ever a moment when you considered giving up TV presenting and focusing solely on singing?**

Absolutely not! Again, “Nur für Dich” didn't fail because of me as a presenter but instead due to the concept. It split opinion in a way. That is why I look to the future and the prospect of my next jobs in front of the camera. I am going to present another show on “Hessischer Rundfunk” in the summer, which I'm really relaxed about.

**You're a very positive-minded person.**

That is just my nature. I'm not someone who mopes about after setbacks. I try to learn from such situations and to take the positives out of them. But

I'm also tenacious. I wouldn't have had a 20-year career in show business otherwise.

**You have the image of an exuberant, radiant woman. Isn't that a burden at times when things aren't going so well?**

No, because I never put on an act. That's really who I am and when things are not going my way I prefer to step out of the limelight instead of shouting about my misfortunes from the rooftops. This may be why people rarely see a miserable Francine Jordi in public. And that is not my job either. I want to give people pleasure through my music and not broadcast my problems publicly.

**It can nevertheless be difficult to step back if you're in the spotlight and appear in the tabloids. I'm thinking of the times, for example, when your marriage to Tony Rominger and your relationship with Florian Ast attracted great media attention. I have learned to accept that this is part of my profession. My life is very public and lots of things are written**

**“My German colleagues were surprised at how fast I spoke”: Francine Jordi is already looking forward to appearing on the next “Silvesterstadl”.**

Photo: Thomas Buchwalder

and speculated about me. But I don't read everything that's written.

**You're now turning 40. I'll end with the age-old question – if you could start your career all over again, what would you do differently?**

Nothing. I always say that you don't make mistakes in life but only gain experience.



## Panoramic paintings – the rebirth of an object of optical fascination

Once commonplace, panoramic paintings received little attention for quite some time. They are now enjoying something of a renaissance. Switzerland has two outstanding examples.

BY JÜRIG MÜLLER

The critic from the “*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*” was taken aback when he first glanced at the powerful painting. He remarked: “It had such a powerful effect on some people that they shed a tear. It is already clear that this work – commissioned by patriotic men – will have a tremendous impact on large swathes of the public.” The newspaper’s prediction at the opening of the Murten Panorama in 1894 was proba-

bly a touch too euphoric. The public were indeed able to admire the hundred-metre-long, ten-metre-high and one-and-a-half-tonne cyclorama of the Battle of Murten for a number of years in Zurich and Geneva, but it then disappeared into oblivion. In 1924, it was purchased by the town of Murten where it was left to rot away in the communal works depot. The battle-scene painting was given a second brief lease of life during the Swiss Na-

tional Exhibition in 2002 when the restored panoramic painting was put on display in a rusty cube on Lake Murten. However, the painting’s scrolls have since been lying in an army depot in the Bernese Oberland facing an uncertain future.

The fate of the Murten Panorama is not atypical for this once commonplace genre of painting. This object of optical fascination is somewhat unwieldy. In a sense it requires a building constructed around it. Many of these panoramic paintings have therefore disappeared or have been burned, destroyed, cut to pieces or quite literally blown away. This is in fact what happened to the highly acclaimed panorama “*Alpes Bernoises*”. In 1903, at the World Expo in Ireland, a hurricane destroyed and tore apart the rotunda and carried the tattered giant canvas out onto the open sea where the mountains and glaciers of the Bernese Oberland were buried in the depths of the ocean.

### Panorama of a highly topical subject

However, there is another side to the story – the renaissance of large-scale panoramic paintings. There are two outstanding examples of exhibitions of such works in Switzerland which are successful and deploy various innovations – the Thun Panorama, idyllically set in a park on Lake Thun, and the Bourbaki Panorama in the centre of Lucerne. Both pieces can be described in superlative terms. The

The Bourbaki Panorama depicts the eastern French army memorably fleeing to Switzerland during the Franco-Prussian War in 1871.

Photo: Bourbaki Museum







Lucerne's Bourbaki Panorama in all its splendour: Edouard Castres' cyclorama is 112 metres in length. Photo: Bourbaki Museum

panorama of Thun created between 1809 and 1814 is the oldest preserved panoramic painting in the world and Switzerland's first. The Bourbaki painting is an unusual unique piece of art in the context of the panorama production of its era. It does not glorify heroic military deeds and victorious battles, as was customary at the time, but instead focuses on a defeat and represents a denouncement of war.

This gigantic panoramic work by Edouard Castres from 1881 is 112 metres long and 10 metres high and is "one of the most impressive spectacles in the history of the medium", according to the Bourbaki Museum's literature. It depicts the eastern French army under General Bourbaki during its memorable escape to Switzerland during the Franco-Prussian War in the harsh winter of 1871. The internment of the 87,000-strong battalion is regarded as the largest admission of refugees ever carried out by Switzerland. A sculptured terrain with figures and props is placed in front of the painting, giving the entire scene a remarkable three-dimensional effect. This huge space depicts the huge mass of people as well as many individual fates and humanitarian acts. Edouard Castres, who produced the painting, was an "embedded" artist in a sense as he accompanied the army as a Red Cross volunteer.

The subject of the panorama – refugees fleeing war and humanitarian aid – is depressingly familiar.

Irène Cramm, director of the Bourbaki Panorama, also confirms that the exhibition is frequently visited by whole groups of asylum seekers. A unique pioneering project for teaching history in the German-speaking world was recently created with the educational app "My Bourbaki Panorama". The teaching tool produced in cooperation with the University of Teacher Education in Lucerne enables interactive learning and not just in the fields of history, humanity and human rights. As the app is available in German, French and English, it will also be



used in language teaching and in cooperation with schools abroad. It has clearly proven successful. Visits by school classes to the Bourbaki Panorama increased by 50 % last year, according to Irène Cramm. A version of the app is also available for visitors. However, neither app can be downloaded privately. They can only be used on site.

**The giant panoramic painting by Castres required a suitably large building – it is surrounded by the Lucerne city library.**

Photo: Bourbaki Museum

The Bourbaki Panorama's educational app has been a big hit. It was presented with two awards last November – the Worlddidac Foundation Award and the Swisscom ICT Innovation Award.

### From gymnasium floor to rotunda

Marquard Woher, an artist from Basel, tackled neither the subject of war and its consequences nor dramatic lofty alpine panoramas but instead focused his attention on a small conservative town. He devoted five years of his life to his monumental painting – the 7.5-metre-high and 38-metre-long Thun Panorama. He completed the sketches while sitting on a rooftop in the middle of Thun's historic centre. The panorama provides views of squares and alleyways, glimpses into living rooms and classrooms as well as vistas of the lake and mountains in the background.

The painting was displayed in a rotunda in Basel for decades before falling victim to financial misfortune. It changed hands several times and ended up in Thun in 1899 after being presented as a gift. However, the town did not particularly appreciate the present and disposed of it under the floorboards of a gymnasium where it was soon forgotten about. When the building was demolished 20 years later, it was rediscovered, but its odyssey was not yet over. Until it was restored



The 7.5-metre-high and 38-metre-long panorama by Marquard Woher is housed in Thun. Photo: Kunstmuseum Thun / Christian Helmle

under a private initiative, the painting was housed in an open shed belonging to the municipal building control office. It was not until 1961 that the panorama was put on public display in a brick-built rotunda in Thun's Schadaupark.

The growing global interest in old panoramic paintings has also increased the value of the Thun Panorama. A new building was opened in 2014 and the painting was comprehensively restored. The building belongs to the city of Thun and the painting to the Gottfried Keller Foun-



**The details of the Thun Panorama have been produced meticulously, as this section depicting a mother and her children at breakfast shows.**

Photo: Gottfried Keller Foundation / Christian Helmle

ation, but administratively the panorama is affiliated to the Kunstmuseum Thun. According to media spokesperson Katrin Sperry, a "sharp increase in visitor numbers" has been recorded since 2014.

This is probably partly due to the fact that its appeal has been enhanced by supporting permanent and temporary exhibitions in both Thun and Lucerne as well as thematically-related events. The gigantic painting nevertheless remains the main attraction. In a strange way, the stories it contains have a more intense impact than the moving images of films. Observers are positively sucked into the painting by the thousands of details. The static nature of the painting also gives free rein to the imagination.

## The "cinema" of the 19th century

In a nutshell, the large-scale panoramic paintings are the precursors to cinema. They are huge, true to reality, rich in detail and tell stories but do not move. Just like at the cinema, the aim is to give the audience the illusion of being in the middle of the action or even part of it. The golden age of the panoramas displayed in monumental rotundas was the 19th century and it came to an end around the time of the First World War. Common subjects included significant historical events – especially major battles – cityscapes, alpine landscapes and religious motifs. The development and success of large-scale panoramas went hand in hand with the enormous growth of the cities.

Panoramas are seen as history's first mass medium. The artists used every possible trick and the latest technical means of the time to give the audience the illusion of being there. From the 1930s, panoramic paintings were often supplemented with a faux terrain – a three-dimensional foreground with figures and props.

Today, only 15 works still exist worldwide of the hundreds of panoramic paintings produced during the 19th century. There are still four in Switzerland – the Bourbaki Panorama, the Thun Panorama, the "Battle of Murten" and the "Crucifixion of Christ" in Einsiedeln. However, panoramic paintings are experiencing a real boom right now. New panoramic works are being produced in many parts of the world based on the established tradition or using new, modern techniques. This medium is today very popular in China.

The medial and cultural significance of large-scale panoramas may be beyond dispute but their actual artistic value is not. They have often been called "expensive fair-ground attractions". "In elevated cultural circles, the panorama was considered an illusion and their creators as craftsmen at best but certainly not artists. At English art schools they even went so far as to refuse entry to panoramic artists," write Hans Dieter Finck and Michael Ganz in their book "Bourbaki Panorama". However, no less a figure than Ferdinand Hodler, the most significant Swiss painter of the 19th century, worked on the Bourbaki Panorama, through which he gained experience as a monumental painter. JM



# “In the Congo”, where drinking beer determines skin colour

In 1996, the Swiss author Urs Widmer gave free rein to his longing for Africa in the most astonishing way.

It was in the spring 21 years ago that Urs Widmer – who was attracting huge attention globally with the hit outsourcing comedy “Top dogs” – informed his publisher about a novel entitled “Im Kongo” (In the Congo). People asked themselves in astonishment whether the then 58-year-old, Basel-born writer, who had lived in Frankfurt for many years but was now based in Zurich, had spent time in Africa at some point in between or had at least kept a trip to the jungle secret from the public. When the novel was unveiled in autumn 1996, it was written from the perspective of a geriatric nurse from Zurich taken to the Congo by a mysterious twist of fate where he writes his memoirs on a laptop.

His name is Kuno Lüscher and, before he turns his attention to the surrounding forest and produces lines like “In the nights of the full moon, you offer up fruit to the mighty one,” he focuses on his father. In the tales which the chief spy of the legendary Swiss Viking Line told his son, Hitler appears in leather trousers and Eva Braun in a nightgown, but the spy thriller also claims victims like Kuno’s mother whom the clever spy was unable to save. In the third chapter attention shifts to the Congo and we discover the adventure that led to Lüscher becoming an African tribal chief.

## Drinking and ecstasy

On behalf of a Swiss brewery, Kuno travels to Kisangani to inspect the branch run by his childhood friend Willy. However, it is not Willy he encounters first but a black lady who claims to be his former lover Sophie who is now married to Willy and without further ado gets him into bed where “waves of ecstasy sweep over them”. When another person of colour pretends to be Willy, Kuno is convinced he is dealing with a band of murderers and fraudsters and only gives credence to the change of skin colour when the black Willy sings the “Sechseläutenmarsch” – the unofficial anthem of Zurich – and Kuno notices with astonishment how his own skin begins to change from white to black when drinking the Congolese special brew Anselme Bock.

Initially as Willy’s great-vizier and, after a victorious battle, as chief, Kuno spends the rest of his life in the Congo, goes around in a loincloth and at night snuggles up with

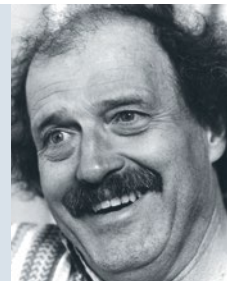
Anne, his colleague from the old people’s home whom he long admired in vain. He has won her over on a trip to Zurich after she once told him he would have to wait for her until he turned black. The forest also excites Kuno “like never before”. “I explore this paradisiacal hell every evening. There are sounds the likes of which you have never heard before. A noise that could be the reverberations of the big bang.”

## What has been invented, and what not?

Urs Widmer told the “Berner Zeitung” that he had never been to the Congo. “The entire book is a kind of wish fulfilment.” When I visited him in his writer-in-residence apartment in September 1996 in Zurich’s Hottingen district, Widmer was sitting at his IBM typewriter into which he had typed the first part of the planned volume “Vor uns die Sündflut”. He told me about his uncle Emil Häberli, who was heavily involved with the Viking Line, but also about the sunset in Timbuktu, where the sun fell “into the horizon like a plane crashing”. I looked around and noticed that on a shelf, alongside a rubber dwarf from his childhood days, there was a beer bottle with the coat of arms of Zaire and that beneath the pages of discarded drafts, which he had thrown onto the floor behind his desk, something like the cover of a laptop could be seen and, on closer inspection, Widmer’s face bore clear traces of a suntan.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: “Im Kongo” was published in 1996 by Diogenes in Zurich.

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST



“All the same, I don’t want to eat until I’m finished. Three days should be enough to write and fast. If I don’t take any breaks, I should manage to take myself from the distant past to the present in 72 hours. Memory and life will be one for a precious moment. After that, it doesn’t matter how I finish the book.”

(From Urs Widmer, “Im Kongo”, Diogenes, Zurich, 1996)

# The first Swiss film buff was a priest

One of the most significant film collections in the world was once assembled by Abbé Joye in Basel. It is in London today, but could it return to Switzerland?

BY SUSANNA PETRIN

This episode in film history could easily be overlooked at first glance and indeed was for some time – too long in fact. A priest collects films to show his protégés during religious education. That sounds kind of nice, but it is actually sensational. This Jesuit priest called Abbé Joye – who was born Joseph Alexis Joye in 1852 in the canton of Fribourg and later lived in Basel – collected hundreds of films over the years. His collection is today considered one of the world’s largest and most significant from the early days of cinema. “It is not a run-of-the-mill collection, it’s absolutely extraordinary,”



**Abbé Joye, the priest who loved film.**

Photo: Jesuit archive in Zurich

remarks Mariann Lewinsky-Sträuli, a Swiss film historian specialising in silent movies. Articles and books suggest there are between 1,300 and 2,500 films. Most of them come from the period 1905 to 1912, while some date up to 1919. Abbé Joye gradually amassed the collection by buying films on the German second-hand market.

The genres include dramas, children’s films, fairytales, animation, war films and what are today called documentaries – “Country, nature, cityscapes and customs” was the label used in one catalogue listing. The films last between three and 15 minutes. Mariann Lewinsky supposes that the priest would have shown 10 to 15 films during a screening. There would have been a “specially selected programme” with “incredibly beautiful cinema covering a wealth of genres and a wide range of aesthetics, making it highly entertaining”.

## Kissing scenes cut

There were no set venues then like those which exist today. Instead touring cinemas travelled from town to town continually showing the same films. In contrast, Abbé Joye showed new films in the same location, which represented a paradigm shift. He therefore needed a decent collection. Urban myth has it that he smuggled some films under his cassock from Germany to Basel. He is said to have cut kissing scenes or diverted the attention of children at these moments during screenings. We are not certain of these details now, over a century later. Lewinsky even doubts that he showed everything in his collection. This is because it also contained the decidedly anti-Catholic film “Les Martyrs de l’Inquisition” from 1905.

The Swiss film historian Roland Cosandey was the first person to document Joye’s story and works in the book “Welcome Home, Joye! Film um 1910”. In 1886, Joye was appointed a vicar and teacher of religious education in Basel. The *Vinzentianum*

orphanage for boys was established several years later, which was called *Borromäum* from 1905. It was here in the room for Sunday school and religious studies that he showed his films. The priest started out with magic lantern projections, which were painted glass panels through which light was projected. He is believed to have produced thousands of them. According to Cosandey, he visited the first cinematographic projections at Basel’s *Stadt-Casino* around 1896. When Joye later took an interest in showing films himself from 1902, there was no stopping him.

Mariann Lewinsky-Sträuli has seen all of his films. To do so she had to travel from Zurich to Berkhamsted, a small town near London. This is where the originals as well as black-and-white copies produced in the UK have been kept since 1976 at the National Film and Television Archive of the British Film Institute. The entire collection almost fell into decay in Basel. After the priest’s death in 1919, his films continued to be regularly screened in the parish but there was clearly a lack of understanding of their sensitivity. In 1958, a Jesuit priest observed with horror that the nitrate films had been kept in an attic for years. A really safe place to keep the film collection could not be found over the following decades either in the canton of Basel-Stadt or anywhere else in Switzerland – not even at the Swiss Film Archive.

The Jesuit therefore arranged for them to be moved to Zurich for storage in the late 1950s and then to the current archive in the UK at the end of the 1970s. He was also the first person to catalogue all the films. However, in





between the collection ended up in the hands of Davide Turconi in Italy during the 1960s. The film historian believed the films were virtually unsalvageable because they had rotted so much. He did something in good faith which turned out to be catastrophic in retrospect. He cut out individual squares to create picture documentation and later stuck the films back together again.

### Still no colour copies

Joye's slides are still kept at the Jesuit archive in Zurich. Around 200 film copies are in Italy. Everything else – in particular the originals on nitrate – is frozen at minus 4 to 5 degrees Celsius in the UK's largest film archive. The archivist responsible, Bryony

Dixon, confirmed that this protects them from further decay. There are around 1,200 films. So what now? Mariann Lewinsky made an application for Switzerland to have its own copies eight years ago for safekeeping and research purposes. The existing black-and-white copies are not the same as the originals as 80% of the nitrate-based positives are in colour. New copies – whether analogue or digital – would have to be colour. But such a project would be extremely time-consuming and expensive. Trained staff would be required to scan and scientifically process the films. Lewinsky estimates that it would cost 4 million francs.

Anyone who comes across Joye's collection recognises its importance and that it would be wonderful to

have it in Switzerland. "It would be fantastic to have a project that would preserve the Joye films on restored film copies in saved colours for centuries to come and that would make them available to the general public," says Beat Schneider, deputy director of the Stadtkino Basel. Esther Baur, the cantonal archivist, has also shown an interest: "The first step, however, would be to determine exactly what should and could be done with the collection." Such a project would require broad support.

All the key questions would still need to be answered. Who would pay, who would carry out the work, and where would it be located? As Roland Cosandey points out, only a tiny proportion of the films can be classified as "Helvetica", or, in other words, depict Swiss subjects. This could make it difficult to obtain Swiss funding. However, the collection as a whole could perhaps be interpreted as "Helvetica" due to the fact that it originated from Basel and its collector was Joye.

Lewinsky-Sträuli, who has saved a number of film collections in the past, says: "That is something which has not been dealt with in my view." In an application, she wrote: "The collection uniquely documents not just the history of film production in its most dynamic stage of development but through it the world and culture of the age." This would enable researchers to piece everything together, eliminate gaps in film history, obtain a better insight into the world at that time and much more besides.

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SUSANNA PETRIN IS CULTURE EDITOR AT  
"BZ BASEL"

# The Swiss flying machine

“Birdly” is a virtual reality system that allows users to experience the same sensations as birds. Invented at the Zurich University of the Arts, it is now being marketed by the start-up company Somniacs.

BY GENEVIÈVE RUIZ

“Inventing an aeroplane is straightforward enough. Constructing one is an entirely different matter. But flying surpasses the lot.” Max Rheiner, who created Birdly, opened his speech at the World.Minds symposium in Zurich in 2014 with this quotation by Otto von Lilienthal, the aeronautics pioneer. This professor at the Zurich University of the Arts told the audience that he had dreamed of flying since childhood and had produced a machine that enabled users to virtually transform themselves into birds.

Birdly is currently considered to be one of the most promising virtual-reality systems on the market and is being marketed by the start-up company Somniacs. But it started life as an artistic research



Fly like a bird: The Swiss invention “Birdly” gives people wings.

Photo: Keystone

project at the Zurich University of the Arts. “The aim was to explore the total immersion of the body in virtual reality,” explains Nathalie Enderle, the Communications Manager at Somniacs. “We focused on the experience of bird flight from a sensual and emotional perspective. We worked closely with a bird protection organisation.” This explains why users were so enthusiastic following a session on Birdly. They experience a full-body sensation of flying. Isn’t that everyone’s dream?

## A flight over New York

To achieve their goal, Max Rheiner and his team designed a system that looks more like an operating table than a golden eagle. Birdly users are strapped to the machine with their arms placed in wooden wings which they can move to soar through the air. They then put on virtual-reality glasses and a headset. A fan in front of their head blows

air to simulate the sensation of speed. Incredibly realistic aerial images based on photographs taken by aeroplane then pass before their eyes. The scenery was designed to reflect a bird’s viewpoint. Users soar through the skies and shave past the skyscrapers of New York or the ridges of the Matterhorn. They determine their direction by swivelling on the wings or by moving their body. If they glance towards their arms, feathered wings appear in their field of vision, further enhancing this immersive experience.

Birdly caused a stir from the moment it was publicly unveiled. It attracted attention at Swissnex 2014 in San Francisco, the Laval Virtual new technology trade fair in France in 2015 and at the South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas, last March. The US press described it in glowing terms, hailing it as a fantastic and futurist virtual reality experience.

## Not for use at home

On the back of this success, the creators of Birdly decided to found the start-up company Somniacs in 2015. Based in Zurich, it currently employs eight people. Its order books are full but there is no point in ordering Birdly for home use: “Birdly is not designed for use at home,” Nathalie Enderle points out. “It is too technical and too big. We opted for a high-end solution. Birdly is expensive and costs as much as a luxury car.” Somniacs’ customers are museums, amusement parks and science centres.

Despite their success, Max Rheiner and his team are not resting on their laurels. They are continuing to work on improvements to their flying machine, particularly in terms of the quality of the landscapes projected. “Users can currently only fly over New York and the Matterhorn,” Nathalie Enderle explains. “We aim to make more landscapes available which are both realistic and extraordinary. We also want to add a fun dimension with features such as Easter eggs that have to be found in the countryside.”

The creators of Birdly are also considering other future applications for their machine in the urban planning and healthcare sectors.

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GENEVIÈVE RUIZ IS A FREELANCE JOURNALIST IN GENEVA



# Offers for young Swiss Abroad aged 15 and over

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) is the centre of expertise for matters concerning young Swiss Abroad. The OSA helps young people to connect with one another and seeks to establish strong ties with Switzerland. The OSA provides information and advice for young people, represents their interests and provides them with an attractive range of holiday and educational offers in Switzerland.

Before the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Basel on the topic of “The Swiss at home and abroad – one world”, the Youth Service is organising a seminar where participants will take an in-depth look at Switzerland. This will focus on topics such as migration, politics, culture and mobility. To what extent does the outlook of young Swiss people abroad differ from that of their counterparts living in Switzerland? The group will meet



youngsters from Basel and the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad. The results will be presented to the audience at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad and the group will meet Federal Councillor Alain Berset.

In addition to participation in the congress and workshops, an attractive and varied recreational programme will be provided. Participants will also have the opportunity to explore the city of Basel.

The seminar will take place from 13 to 20 August 2017.

If you have decided on the spur of the moment to take part in one of the holiday or educational offers provided by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) and have not yet registered, you can still take part. There are a few places still available:

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad  
 Youth Service  
 +41 31 356 61 00  
 youth@aso.ch  
 www.aso.ch  
 www.swisscommunity.org

Participants of the Youth Service seminar in 2017 will also meet Federal Councillor Alain Berset.

# 95th Congress of the Swiss Abroad from 18 to 20 August 2017 in Basel

“The Swiss at home and abroad – one world” is the theme of the 95th Congress of the Swiss Abroad which will be held in Basel from 18 to 20 August. The Swiss Travel System is providing a special offer for participants. They will receive a 75 % discount on the purchase of a Swiss Travel Pass Flex. This entitles holders to unlimited use of most means of public transport in Switzerland. The Swiss Travel Pass Flex can be ordered on special terms until the end of June 2017.

Information on this year’s congress (programme, online registration, accommodation in Basel, purchase of a Swiss Travel Pass Flex on preferential terms, etc.) can be found at [www.aso-kongress.ch](http://www.aso-kongress.ch).

We hope you are able to attend.

Please send me the registration documents in spring 2017 for the 95th Congress of the Swiss Abroad (18 to 20 August 2017) in Basel.

Surname/first name: .....

Address: .....

Country/postcode/city: .....

Email: .....

Please write legibly and in block capitals.

The registration documents are available in two languages:

German  French (Please tick the language required.)

Send the completed form to:

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## “You always remain Swiss”

Davide Wüthrich grew up in Italy and recently moved to Lausanne. An interview with the President of the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad on the topic of “The Swiss at home and abroad – one world”.

BY MARKO LEHTINEN

**The theme of the next Congress of the Swiss Abroad is “The Swiss at home and abroad – one world”. One key aspect is how the Swiss diaspora see Switzerland from outside. You grew up in Italy. Do you think the Swiss in Italy see their native country differently to their compatriots at home?**

Yes and no. People who were born and grew up abroad definitely see Switzerland in a different way from those born there. People who have lived in Switzerland have clear memories of it based on first-hand experience whereas those who haven't got this experience get to know it through what their parents tell them, by talking to relatives, watching films, taking part in Swiss society activities and occasional summer holidays, as in my case. This gives us the impression that we know it almost like a work of art by Monet or Seurat. From a distance we are able to appreciate it in its entirety and form an overall view of it, but when we get close to it we realise that not everything is as we thought.

**You recently moved to Lausanne.**

**Has your personal view of Switzerland changed since moving there?**

Returning to Switzerland has given me the opportunity to see how the impressions I had compare with day-to-day reality. I realised that Switzerland was much more than chocolate, Tölerone, banks and cheese with holes in, as people abroad think, but rather a nation with tremendous potential. Personally, I always worried that the Swiss lifestyle would be too orderly for me but French-speaking Switzerland has turned out to be a pleasant sur-



**Davide Wüthrich** is 27 years old and grew up in Turin. He graduated from the faculty of engineering at the Polytechnic University of Turin in 2010. He then moved to Lausanne to do a master's degree in water management at the Federal Institute of Technology. Davide Wüthrich is also the President of the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad.

prise in terms of social tolerance and multi-ethnicity. Unfortunately, the image of Swiss people abroad is that they are all rich, a little bit snobbish and individualistic. That's far from the truth, but it is only by living here and getting to know them that I have met some very modest and friendly people with whom I have established lasting friendships.

**What do you particularly like and dislike about Switzerland?**

I like the fact that Switzerland gives young people the opportunity to establish a stable and prosperous future based on merit, something which is becoming increasingly difficult in other countries. And by opportunity I mean stable, well-paid employment that enables them to pursue long-term plans without having to worry about whether they have enough money to last until the end of the month. It may seem banal, but I very much enjoy the scenery and the fact that people love outdoor activities. I like the way people attach such importance to protecting the landscape and that you can get anywhere by public transport. However, I don't identify with the highly family-oriented lifestyle, which means shops are closed on Sundays and you can't go shopping after 7 p.m. during the week. It is certainly a lot less vibrant than the Mediterranean countries that I'm used to.

**Some Swiss people have an ambivalent attitude towards the Swiss Abroad. For example, they are calling for the abolition of dual citizenship. What do you make of that?** My personal view is that scrapping dual citizenship would be a huge mis-

take. I'm Italian and Swiss and don't see that as irreconcilable in any way. Swiss people will always be Swiss regardless of their country of residence or whether they hold another passport. Dual citizenship can be passed on by a foreign parent and I believe it is selfish to ask someone to give up part of their identity. I think we must learn to live with such multiculturalism and dual/triple citizenships as, given the current mobility, things can only “get worse”.

**Other people believe the Swiss Abroad should not be allowed to vote in elections and referenda. Their argument is: why should they have a say in a country that they don't even live in? Do you understand their point?**

Yes, their point of view is understandable to an extent. Nevertheless, I strongly disagree with it. The Swiss Abroad are less concerned about some of the issues voted on but there are others (such as immigration and relations with the European Union, for example) which concern them just as much as Swiss citizens living at home. Such referenda set the course of the country's future and I firmly believe that the Swiss Abroad are fully entitled to be able to return to Switzerland one day and find a country with a system in which they believe and ideals that they identify with. Voting is a privilege, not an obligation and, personally speaking, if I don't feel involved or don't have a clear opinion about a particular issue, I don't vote. It's always down to the individual to decide whether to vote and what to vote. As far as the Swiss Abroad are concerned, the right to vote is the only

thing that prevents the political class from forgetting about us.

**You are the President of the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad, which was established quite recently. What are your main goals?**

Our main aim is to inspire young Swiss people abroad to be part of the international community. Sadly, the members of Swiss societies around the world are getting older, and we need the younger generation to take over; we hope to be able to help rejuvenate our extensive family. We are using the types of communication that young people like best, such as Facebook and the internet, in the hope of reaching as many people as possible. Our goals remain to raise young people's awareness of political issues (without ever taking a position), to inform them about developments in Switzerland and to facilitate communication between people all over the world.

**Is the typical young Swiss person abroad interested and involved in politics?**

Some are, some aren't – you can't generalise. Over these past two years as President of the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad, I've met lots of people with a very strong interest in Swiss politics but also lots of youngsters with absolutely no interest at all. I get the impression that the apathy is often down to a lack of information or not feeling directly involved and these are things we are seeking to rectify through the Youth Parliament's activities. We are currently trying to encourage the set-up of local sub-groups in various countries, like the ones which already exist in Italy, Austria and Chile. We hope to add other countries to this list in future.

**What have you achieved with the Youth Parliament so far?**

We're a young organisation – we've not even been going for two years – and the main aim of the first year was to

## Theme of the 95th Congress of the Swiss Abroad: "The Swiss at home and abroad – one world"

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) often highlights the importance to Switzerland of the external perspective of the Swiss Abroad. The congress taking place from 18 to 20 August in Basel aims to highlight the extent to which the perspective of the Swiss Abroad sometimes differs from that of their compatriots at home, how the Swiss in Switzerland react to that and the specific benefits of this special outlook. Various viewpoints of Swiss people abroad will be explored.

get to know one another. We need to let the Swiss societies know we are here and while there are not many of us at the moment, we are stepping up our activities and need their full support. In parallel, we have started to develop a network of young Swiss people abroad which we hope to expand over the next few years, mainly through our Facebook group and by

creating a website shortly. We've also managed to obtain a seat on the Council of the Swiss Abroad and will have up to three from the next "legislative period" which is a landmark achievement in itself. Inspiring our young people undoubtedly requires perseverance and dedication. We are giving our all and hope our hard work will soon pay off.

## Focus on the electoral roll

The Council of the Swiss Abroad's spring meeting took place on 25 March in the Kursaal in Berne. In all, 66 Council members attended.

The meeting's main point of discussion was a possible amendment to the electoral procedure of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) from 2021. A working group led by Franz Muheim, a CSA member from the UK, presented a report on this matter with recommendations. The working group indicated that future candidates should be entered on the Swiss electoral roll. Muheim said that CSA members should "be familiar with politics in Switzerland". However, the same principle would not apply to voters. Entry on the electoral roll should not be made compulsory in order for them to vote. The Executive Board took a different view. It was not keen to establish any difference between active and passive voting rights for various reasons. This means that both candidates and voters should be entered on the electoral roll.

There was support for the working group's position from the ranks – for example, from Mexico, the second country – alongside Aus-

tralia – where a pilot project with a more open voting system is currently being carried out: "Great interest has been shown in our pilot project under which all Swiss Abroad can vote," remarked Patrick Wyss, a CSA member from Mexico. However, some representatives held different views. For example, Jean-Paul Aeschliemann from France voiced clear support for the Executive Board's proposal. In the end a majority of Council members voted in favour of the Executive Board's proposal. Further work will be carried out on this issue in cooperation with the working group.

Voting also took place in the Kursaal on 25 March as well as debate. Peter Wüthrich was appointed as a new member from Switzerland and treasurer. Hans Ambühl is another new CSA member from Switzerland. In addition, two new Swiss societies were recognised by the OSA – the Swiss Society of Serbia and the Buffalo City Swiss Club from South Africa.

MARKO LEHTINEN



## Springboard for education

Switzerland has an excellent and diverse education system. It is also distinguished by great freedom of choice. This means that people taking an apprenticeship can go on to study at a university of applied sciences thanks to the vocational baccalaureate, or at a traditional university by sitting additional entry qualifications. In 2015, over 220,000 young people in Switzerland were undertaking basic vocational training (apprenticeships) and just under 240,000 students were enrolled at traditional universities, universities of applied sciences or teacher training colleges.

Finding the right path is not always easy for young Swiss Abroad wishing to undertake education or training in their native country. A professional advisory meeting can help the decision-making process. Educationsuisse – in cooperation with the BIZ Bern-Mittelland careers advice and information centre – provides advisory consultations for choosing career paths and courses of study.

The issue of paying for education is also often raised. Applications can be made for cantonal grants in the case of low-income households. Responsibility lies with the home canton as far as young Swiss Abroad are concerned. Educationsuisse provides young people with support and advice when applying for cantonal grants. Educationsuisse can also provide small grants or loans itself thanks to various funds (Pro Patria, Gazzetta Svizzera, foundations).

Embarking upon education is not always easy for young people a long way from home. Educationsuisse – in cooperation with the OSA's Youth Service – offers initial support through the Springboard project. Young people (aged 18 and over) have the opportunity to stay with a host family when starting their education to help them settle into Swiss life. If you have any questions about the Springboard project or any other Educationsuisse services, contact our employees by email or telephone or arrange a meeting in person (by appointment). Our employees speak German, French, English, Italian and Spanish.



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educationsuisse – education in Switzerland

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## The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad is celebrating

### Advance information on the 2017/18 winter camp

This year's anniversary winter camp will take place at the Tga da Lai holiday complex in Valbella, Grisons (Wed., 27.12.2017 to Fri., 5.1.2018). The registration process will begin on 15 September 2017.

Experience Switzerland's mountain scenery in winter and learn how to ski and/or snowboard or improve your skills. The FYSA is providing this opportunity to Swiss children abroad aged 8 to 14. If you are interested, register from 15 September 2017 on our website: <http://sjas.ch/en/camps/registration>.

### Final available places for the summer camps

There are still a few places available for our summer camps. The exact details and the registration form can be found under the above link.

### Reductions

The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad wishes to give all Swiss children abroad the opportunity to discover Switzerland in this way on at least one occasion. We can therefore offer reduced rates in justified cases. The required form can be requested via the registration form. The FYSA office would be pleased to provide you with further information.



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Fondation pour les enfants suisses à l'étranger  
Fondazione per i giovani svizzeri all'estero  
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CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Please advise your local embassy or consulate. Do not write to the editorial office in Berne.



## USA: Global Entry programme

Following a decision by the Federal Council on 11 January 2017, Swiss citizens at home and abroad are able to apply for enrolment in the Global Entry programme from 1 February 2017. The programme fast-tracks entry into the USA for people who have already undergone background checks by authorities in Switzerland and the USA. Pre-approved travellers can enter the USA via automatic kiosks, thus avoiding potentially long waiting times when arriving in the USA. [www.fedpol.admin.ch](http://www.fedpol.admin.ch) > Latest news > News > 11.01.2017

### Important notice

Please notify your Swiss representation of your email address(es) and mobile telephone number(s) and/or any changes to these and register at the online desk ([www.eda.admin.ch](http://www.eda.admin.ch)) or via [www.swissabroad.ch](http://www.swissabroad.ch) to ensure you do not miss any communications.

The latest issue of "Swiss Review" and previous issues can be read and/or printed out at any time at [www.revue.ch](http://www.revue.ch). "Swiss Review" (or "Gazzetta Svizzera" in Italy) is sent free of charge to all households of Swiss Abroad who are registered with an embassy or consulate general either in printed format or electronically (via email or as an iPad/Android app).

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## Switzerland in space

The brochure shows through examples the importance of space travel for Switzerland and European cooperation, as well as for research and industry – but also how we benefit from it in our daily lives. Order free of charge at [www.fdfa.admin.ch/publication](http://www.fdfa.admin.ch/publication) > topic: science and space travel



## Federal referenda

Voting proposals are determined by the Federal Council at least four months before the voting date. The following proposals will be put on the vote on 24 September 2017:

- Federal Decree of 14 March 2017 on Food Security (direct counter-proposal to the popular initiative "For food security", which has now been withdrawn) (BBl 2017 2383);
- Federal Decree of 17 March 2017 on Additional Funding for AHV (Old-Age and Survivors Insurance) by increasing Value Added Tax (BBl 2017 2381);
- Federal Act of 17 March 2017 on the Reform of Retirement Provision 2020 (BBl 2017 2393).

Further voting date 2017: 26 November

All information on the proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations of Parliament and the Federal Council, electronic voting, etc.) can be found at [www.admin.ch/votes](http://www.admin.ch/votes).

## Popular initiatives

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

- 'For clean drinking water and healthy food – No subsidies for pesticides and the prophylactic use of antibiotics' (21.09.2018)
- 'For a ban on financing war material manufacturers' (11.10.2018)

The list of pending popular initiatives can be found at [www.bk.admin.ch](http://www.bk.admin.ch) under Aktuell > Wahlen und Abstimmungen > Hängige Volksinitiativen.

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## Contract children, institutionalised children, forcibly adopted children – late recognition of suffering and injustice

Switzerland is coming to terms with a dark chapter in its social history. The main victims were contract children, children in care, people held in administrative detention and those who faced compulsory adoption or sterilisation. Many of these people were subjected to physical, mental or sexual abuse over many years. Partly as a result of these traumatic experiences, many of them are living in precarious conditions to this day.

In recognition of the injustice they faced and by way of redress, the victims of such compulsory social measures and placements are to receive a solidarity contribution. On 30 September 2016, the Swiss Parliament therefore passed the Federal Act on Compulsory Social Measures and Placements prior to 1981, earmarking 300 million Swiss francs to finance the plan.

In addition to compensation, the law envisages various measures for assisting the victims. Amongst other things, they are to receive advice and support from cantonal authorities and archives in completing applications and obtaining the necessary documents. The archives must also grant the victims simple and free access to files that concern them.

### Solidarity contribution

Anyone who considers himself or herself a victim under this law and who would like to claim a solidarity contribution must complete the relevant application form, either by themselves or with the aid of the cantonal authorities or archives, and send it to the Federal Office of Justice by 31 March 2018.

All victims will receive the same amount. The sum, which will depend on the total number of applications received, will be a maximum of 25,000 francs per person. The first payments are to be made from April 2018 onwards.

### Applications from the Swiss Abroad

The following special rules apply to applicants living outside Switzerland: Applications may be sent to the Federal Office of Justice by post, but may also be handed in directly at Swiss embassies or consulates. There, applicants will also have to obtain a life certificate and, where appropriate, provide a delivery address in Switzerland. Recipients of a solidarity contribution will only be subject to the special statutory regulations on tax, social welfare, social insurance and debt recovery if they are resident in Switzerland. People living outside Switzerland will be subject to the relevant national regulations.

Useful information, application forms and a guide are available in the three national languages on the website of the Federal Office of Justice: [www.bj.admin.ch](http://www.bj.admin.ch) > Society > Compulsory social measures and placements.

For further information, please contact: FSZM secretariat (by phone: +41 58 462 42 84 or by email: [sekretariat@fuersorgerischeschwangsmassnahmen.ch](mailto:sekretariat@fuersorgerischeschwangsmassnahmen.ch))

## Three people, three stories

These reports by the victims of Switzerland's compulsory social measures are extremely personal and tell a tale of unspeakable suffering that continues to affect the victims and their families to this day.

### Bernadette Gächter's story

"I am one of those women who were forced to have abortions and be sterilised on the basis of eugenic principles. This was in the canton of St. Gallen in 1972. When I accidentally fell pregnant at the age of 18, I was told I was mentally disturbed even though I had graduated from secondary school. Doctors, my guardian and my foster parents told me I had brain damage and that my child would also be born with brain damage. They had me sterilised the same way you sterilise a cat to prevent it having four litters a year. I could no longer start a family, no longer have children. As a young woman, it hurt me deeply whenever I saw mothers with their babies

Bernadette Gächter, who was forcibly sterilised as a young woman.  
Photo: Remo Neuhaus  
© Guido Flury Foundation





or children. Today, whenever I see women with their grandchildren, it still pains me greatly. I have no feeling in my belly to this day. I've been fighting for my rights for 30 years. It takes enormous strength, incredible energy and a very strong will to live a meaningful life in spite of something like that. Following a decision by the Council of Europe on 26 June 2013, I am now entitled to compensation."

## Alfred Ryter's story

"My mother suffered from a serious and long-drawn-out illness, with trips to spas over many years. So, when I was barely eight, I was sent to work on the farm of a childless couple, presumably for financial reasons. My two older brothers also became contract children. From then on, I slept on an old sofa in a threshing room, covered in old woollen blankets and surrounded by feed and all kinds of machines. When I realised where I was and how I was being treated, I became rebellious. I begged, wept and banged my feet against the door of the threshing room. I smashed things around me. To no avail. They were more powerful and they broke me. From then on, I was repeatedly starved, beaten and disregarded. However, it couldn't touch me anymore. I felt best when I was at work, which was long and hard. But at least I wasn't locked up. Hunger and pain were now my constant companions. Whenever I got too hungry, I ate pig slops or chicken feed. In the morning, when I returned from the cowshed and brought the farmer's wife the milk, I was given a piece of bread and jam as my morning meal, as well as a cup of milk, although that was diluted with cold water. At first, the farmer's wife told me she had poured cold water into the milk to prevent me from scalding myself while drinking.

If I misbehaved, which the farming folk believed was often the case, I was given only a piece of bread without jam and cold water for my morning meal. That would have to last me all day. I lost weight until I was just skin and bones. Did no-one notice? Why not?

"One of the most severe punishments I received was when I stole an orange from some summer visitors. When the farmer's wife found

out, she beat me with farm implements till I bled and locked me in the threshing room. A short time later, I was taken outside, forced to strip naked and told to sit in cold well water, whereupon the farmer's wife scrubbed me with a rice root brush. Thieves didn't only need beating, she said. They also had to have their evil scrubbed away.

"Fifty years later, my past caught up with me. I had suffered from depression previously, although I didn't really know why. Now I do. I had to cope with a number of devastating events: the suicides of my brothers and the constant reminders of my hellish youth. Thanks to more than 20 years' support from my psychiatrist and strong medication, I am now somewhat more stable. My time as a contract child shaped my entire life. Even my wife and two children suffered as a result."

## Clément Weilly's story

"I was born in Fribourg public hospital in 1954. My brother was born in 1952. Our parents abandoned us after our birth. First we were housed in the surgical and paediatric wards of Fribourg cantonal hospital, then at the St. Francis home for babies in Courtepin and in Pringy. Just like in all our subsequent placements, we were under the guardianship of the local authorities. From 1958 to 1968, we were placed in the orphanage of the civic community of the city of Fribourg. The director was very strict, knew no mercy, beat us and refused us meals. We were constantly punished, and extremely brutally. I had a pillow pressed over my face until I passed out. I was the victim of sexual abuse and voyeurism. At school, the other kids made fun of us because we were orphans. The teachers abused us. In 1962, a new director was appointed and he was a bit more compassionate. From 1968 to 1970, my brother and I were split up and I was placed with a farming family. The work was hard, with many restrictions attached and I wasn't paid. I worked from 5.30 in the morning until 8 at night and attended school occasionally. Every now and then, the family were nice or friendly towards me. During this time, my brother was housed with a family of chimney sweeps, for whom he worked unpaid. At the age of 16, I was sent to a home again, this



Clément Weilly,  
former contract child  
Photo: Remo Neuhaus  
© Guido Flury Foundation

time a home for apprentices in Fribourg, where I was trained to become a plumber. The older children abused us mentally, physically and sexually. The educators pretended not to notice. My brother was also sent to that home, where he trained to become a shoe salesman. But we weren't there at the same time. He was abused in the same way I was. We grew up and then started work with no personal environment, no knowledge and no guidance. We were never prepared for life as young adults, with all that this entails. We were clueless and open to manipulation. We lacked basic knowledge about how to manage our finances or avoid danger. People therefore took advantage of our naivety and tricked us into taking out micro-loans. I'm still paying off my debts. Today, I am still living off a small disability pension and I managed to found the association Agir pour la Dignité." [The association supports victims of compulsory social measures and works to raise awareness about the issue among the general public. – Ed.]

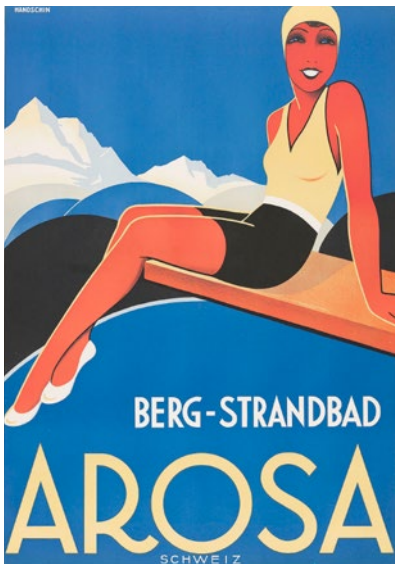
## The holiday idyll of yesteryear

Tourism in Switzerland has been systematically promoted since its early days. The organisation Switzerland Tourism is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. To mark the occasion, the Museum of Design is exhibiting colourful and striking advertising posters from times long gone. The slogan is: "Take a Holiday" – in Switzerland! LEH

"Take a Holiday!" – exhibition until 9 July 2017 at the Museum of Design in Zurich. [www.museum-gestaltung.ch](http://www.museum-gestaltung.ch)



"Winter in Davos", 1914



"Arosa", 1933



"Springtime trips", 1945





"Holidays in Switzerland", 1946.



"Skiing in Switzerland", 1971



"Lake Zurich", 1935



"Rigi", 1957



## A million-dollar prize



JONAS LÜSCHER: "Kraft".  
C.H. Beck Verlag, 2017  
237 pages; around  
CHF 28.90

"Kraft is struggling. And as always, whenever the going gets tough, he escapes into research." It is not just the presentation he should give as a participant in a science competition in Silicon Valley that the professor of rhetoric from Tübingen is finding difficult. "Why is everything that exists good and how can it still be improved?" This is the question Richard Kraft has to answer. The incentive is prize money of a million dollars. This would allow him to get his life in order and to pay for his seemingly inevitable divorce.

In a little over 200 pages, we follow the professor to the USA to the prestigious Stanford University where he plans to write the 18-minute answer to the prize question over four weeks. He has left his second wife and twin daughters behind in Germany. Through flashbacks readers discover quite a lot about Kraft's past, his relationships with women and his friendship with Istvan, the pseudo-dissident from Hungary, who Kraft is now staying with. The dramatic climax of the novel will not be disclosed here.

After his highly acclaimed first work, the novella "Frühling der Barbaren", Jonas Lüscher's latest novel has been eagerly awaited. Using the first-person plural form, thus drawing the reader in, the story is sometimes told with a touch of irony and comedy, but at other times with distance. While the plot is interesting, it also seems very constructed. We find it difficult to identify with Kraft, the protagonist. The traits of this university professor, who champions market liberalisation and cheered on Ronald Reagan as a young student in Berlin, are too disagreeable.

The book can be read in a variety of ways – as social criticism, biting satire or as a philosophical essay. However, the long-winded sentences often seem stilted and require readers to concentrate intensely. The author set the bar high. Nevertheless, the quotations that precede every chapter and always make reference to the word "Kraft" entice people to read on.

Jonas Lüscher, who was born in 1976, grew up in Berne where he completed the training to become a primary school teacher. He later studied philosophy and carried out research as a doctoral student at the Federal Institute of Technology Zurich. Lüscher has been living in Munich for several years. His novella "Frühling der Barbaren" (2013) was translated into a number of languages and adapted for theatre. This novel, entitled "Kraft", will soon be published in French and Dutch.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

## Heaven and hell



REGULA MÜHLEMANN:  
"Mozart, Arias". Sony, 2016

When Regula Mühlemann was once referred to as the "Swiss Callas" by Swiss television, she felt "extremely embarrassed". She is nevertheless open-minded to media that reduce a highly promising singing career to two or three keywords. The tweeting soprano from Lucerne believes new social media channels allow other people to discover classical music. "I am of an age where it may still be possible to build a bridge to young people. Acting as an intermediary between these two worlds where possible is also part of my job." She was therefore pleased to sit down with the pop-star Beatrice Egli for a double interview.

Mühlemann was born in Adligenswil in the canton of Lucerne in 1986. She joined the ensemble of the Luzerner Theater in 2010 but quickly realised that she "needed air and wanted to become an independent artist". This was a risky step but she soon attracted the attention of big players in the opera world after shining as Ännchen in a movie version of Carl M. von Weber's opera "Der Freischütz". She performed minor singing roles all over the place in Zurich, Salzburg, Vienna, Berlin, Paris and Aix-en-Provence.

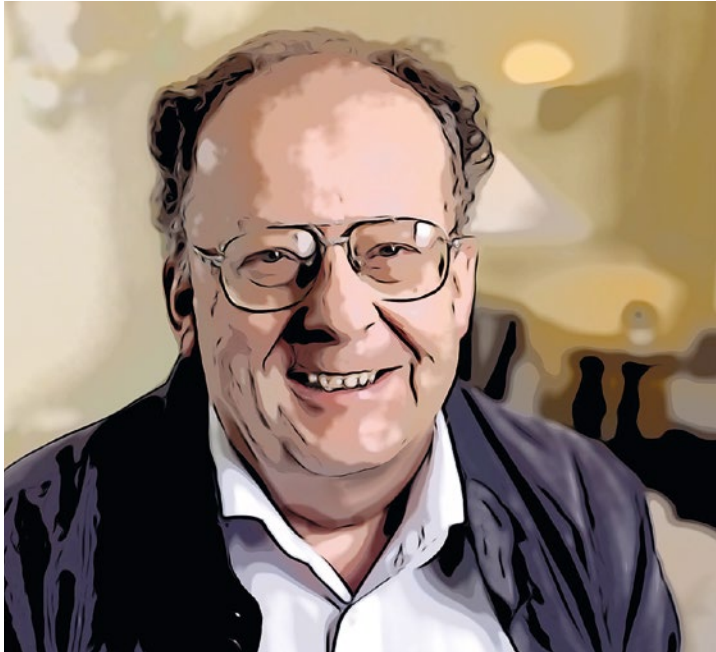
This splendidly light and smiling voice which exudes youthfulness can now also be enjoyed on CD. On her Mozart album she revealingly sings "Schon lacht der holde Frühling" at the beginning and creates little dramas out of the lovely verses as if to celebrate her coloratura skills in a fresh and cheerful way. The album then climbs Mount Olympus to the terrific concert aria "Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio": "Let me explain, oh God, how bitter my grief is." Mozart takes us through heaven and hell in six and a half minutes. Mühlemann lays bare her feelings on this emotional roller-coaster where many other sopranos simply go through the motions of singing the notes with detached technique.

"Not dramatic enough," may remark a senior critic who applies a century-long benchmark. The fact that Mühlemann is just 30 years old should provide a satisfactory answer.

The path has been paved. It would be astonishing if she failed to secure lead roles after lots of minor ones at major opera houses. Despite all the acclaim and glitz she still has to take this step. Perhaps she will soon be able to proudly repeat the line she utters with an A-major laugh: "I have a great responsibility on the stage and have to try to show the audience heaven, even if that may sound rather melodramatic."

CHRISTIAN BERZINS

# Beat Richner



Anyone around the age of 50 will vividly remember Beatocello, the sad clown with the large, small and tiny cellos. Beat Richner entertained an entire generation of Swiss children during the 1970s with his performances. Others will have become familiar with him later on through his charity work as a paediatrician.

Richner rebuilt a destroyed children's hospital in Phnom Penh in the early 1990s. He has since run it himself and overseen its continual expansion. Over the years, the native of Zurich has also opened three further children's hospitals in Cambodia. Richner and his teams are said to have treated around 12 million children in the first 10 years of their activities in Asia alone. Almost 90% of all the nation's sick children have received treatment from the Swiss doctor at some point. This has earned the tireless man of action the nickname "Doctor God".

Beat Richner has been awarded two honorary doctorates for his lifetime achievements and was voted "Swiss Person of the Year" in 2002. Yet he remains very modest. The doctor has repeatedly returned to Switzerland to raise money for the hospitals by giving cello concerts. He has worked tirelessly for the children of Cambodia. However, Beat Richner must now take it easy. The 70-year-old is seriously ill and has handed over the management of his hospitals. He has also been forced to cancel planned performances.

Let us hope that Richner is around for the children of this world for a long time to come. Through his hospitals and the character of Beatocello, he has already become a legend.

MARKO LEHTINEN

## New popular initiative against the manufacturers of war material

The Group for Switzerland without an Army (GSoA) unanimously resolved to launch a popular initiative "against the financing of war material manufacturers" at its annual general meeting at the beginning of April. The Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP) adopted a resolution at its meeting of delegates to help with the collection of signatures for the initiative. The GSoA – together with the Young Greens – hopes to prevent the Swiss National Bank and the pension funds from investing in the weapons industry. The GSoA's last attempt to curb trade in war material through an initiative was an unsuccessful one in 2009.

## Old banknotes retain their value

Old Swiss banknotes are to be exchanged at their value without any expiry date in future. In agreement with the Swiss National Bank (SNB), the Federal Council is proposing the lifting of the current exchange deadline. The aim is to prevent people holding banknotes which suddenly lose



their value. Potential victims are heirs to assets which include banknotes that can no longer be exchanged. Foreign workers who return to their country of origin and keep old series of banknotes can also be affected.

## Federal Council pledge on e-voting

In a fundamental decision, the Federal Council declared its support for creating the basis for comprehensive e-voting in Switzerland. Electronic voting is to become established as the third voting channel and given equal status to the postal vote and ballot box within a few years. However, the Federal Council does not want to oblige the cantons to introduce e-voting for the time being. A specially appointed expert group is now working on drawing up the consultation draft on e-voting. Parliament is likely to begin its deliberations next year.





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