

# SWISS REVIEW

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The magazine for the Swiss Abroad  
January 2018



**Ups and downs but a happy ending –  
the career of Martina Hingis**

**A fight for survival and “No Billag” –  
the Swiss media industry in turmoil**

**The legendary “Davos” sledge –  
we visit a sledge-maker**

# What do you think of the «No Billag» initiative?



*The Executive Board of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) opposes the «No Billag» initiative in order to guarantee the quality of information for Swiss living abroad. The vote will take place on 4 March 2018.*

*Take part in the discussions on [SwissCommunity.org](http://SwissCommunity.org), the platform for the Swiss Abroad.*



## SwissCommunity.org

The platform for the Swiss Abroad

SwissCommunity.org is a social network set up by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA)

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## The OSA is opposed to “No Billag”

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Diversity of opinion and media, exchange between the various linguistic regions, an understanding of our different cultures, and news from and about Switzerland – these are values which we are proud of and which are part of the mandate of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SBC). Should that all come to an end?

As much as 75 percent of the SBC’s funding comes from licence fees, but the “No Billag” initiative, which will be put to the vote on 4 March, aims to do away with them. It is not seeking to reduce the fees but instead wants to completely abolish them at constitutional level, stipulating that: “Federal government will not operate its own radio and television stations in times of peace.” That would mean over and out for the broadcasters SRF, RTS, RSI and RTR. It would bring an end to the SBC’s radio and television programmes in four national languages and the close partnership between swissinfo and the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad. It would also mean job losses for around 6,000 SBC staff and 900 redundancies at 34 local radio and TV stations which also currently receive a share of the licence fees.

If the annual radio and television fees of 365 francs are abolished, it would rapidly result in the closure of the SBC. This would be a huge loss to society and the media scene in Switzerland. Pay TV is no alternative and would cost us more than the licence fee after tuning in just a few times.

The details can be discussed and there is room for improvement. However, overall the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation provides an excellent national and local public service and, at a time of digital fragmentation, it is a guarantor of high-quality information, communication and entertainment. The OSA Executive Board therefore recommends the rejection of the “No Billag” initiative.

REMO GYSIN, PRESIDENT OF THE OSA



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## Landslides in the mountains. Climate change in Switzerland



Glaciers shrink and expand again. This had been true in the Alps – until now. It now appears the glaciers are disappearing altogether. There will be nothing left to expand again. These changes could have far-reaching implications for our country. The glaciers are part of our water system. If they cease to exist, the flora, fauna and local climate will change. Instead of being the “reservoir of Europe” with flowing rivers, we are faced with flooding and drought.

HELEN MEIER, SWITZERLAND

Frightening! The world is on a general unstoppable collision course if we continue to burn our future. Many countries will disappear causing huge loss of life through climate change.

WESSEL VAN LEEUWEN, SOUTH AFRICA

It is arrogant to think that we insignificant humans can affect the course of the universe. Only 10,000 years ago my city was at the bottom of the Champlain Sea with about 150 meters of water above us. What happened? Climate change happened, as it has since time immemorial. In the meantime, a lot of people make a lot of money selling gullible and unquestioning innocents false environmental goods and ideas, and a lot of politicians frighten us into submission and increased environmental taxes. Nobody tells us what will happen if we do what they want us to do in 100, 1,000 or 10,000 years, because they just don't know, do they? It's easy and facile to jump on the bandwagon and decry President Trump. But what if he is right? I remember being taken to the Aaregletscher as a highschool student to see how quickly it melted. The professor explained to us, and that is decades ago, that the mountains around us would likely crumble once the support structure of the glaciers and underlying permafrost was gone, but that was the inevitable consequence of the interglacial period. He told us that one day the glacier may begin to grow again and that we would then know that we were heading into a new ice age. There have been at least 17 cycles between glacial and interglacial periods. The glacial periods lasted longer than the interglacial periods. The last glacial period began about 100,000 years ago and lasted until 25,000 years ago. Today we are in a warm interglacial period.

MARGRET ALLEN, USA

An article that should be read by the American population and all its politicians. The reality of this phenomenon is terrifying.

GACHOU PLETTS, UNITED KINGDOM

## Ticino represented again at last. Ignazio Cassis, the new Federal Councillor



I think it's a bit of a shame that the female candidate from Ticino was ruled out by the people of Ticino themselves. Winning easily is to triumph ingloriously.

MICHEL PIGUET, CZECH REPUBLIC

I'm so glad to learn that after some 18 years a Federal Councillor from the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland has been elected. Congratulations, best wishes and lots of success to Ignazio Cassis!

CLAUDIO ISEPPI, USA

## Bank accounts and insurance cover for the Swiss Abroad. An interview with Remo Gysin, the President of the OSA

I had some funds with UBS from childhood before my family moved to New Zealand, and used the account when I returned home infrequently. The fees were insane and the account would have been emptied in a few years with the fees alone. I had no choice but to close it and move the funds offshore. I wasn't happy about it and the effort and paperwork involved wasn't that straightforward either.

JOHN PREISIG, NEW ZEALAND

# The Swiss media industry is undergoing a stress test

A swingeing attack on public service broadcasting from the “No Billag” initiative, the press fights for survival, and tentative new approaches in online media: the Swiss media industry is in a state of turmoil.

JÜRIG MÜLLER

It is not yet clear whether the “No Billag” initiative is just a passing challenge or represents Armageddon for the media industry. The short form of the initiative’s title has been cleverly chosen. Billag collects the mandatory licence fees for radio and television and is just about as popular with the public as the tax authorities. However, the referendum is not about the company Billag, but instead nothing short of the future of the Swiss media industry. In a nutshell, the initiative calls for the abolition of radio and television licence fees. If it is approved at referendum on 4 March, broadcasters face closure. The Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) would be deprived of its financial basis, but 34 private radio and TV channels would also be hugely affected.

The initiative was launched several years ago by a small group supported by a number of young politicians from the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) and the FDP. The Liberals (FDP). The authors of the initiative were not taken very seriously at first. But it is now clear that the once insignificant small faction has triggered probably the most far-reaching and fierce debate on media policy in Switzerland’s history. A yes vote at the ballot box could shake the Swiss media system to its core. “That would be really bad for Switzerland,” remarks Silke Adam, a professor and director of the Institute of Communication and Media Studies at the University of Berne. This is mainly because “high-quality journalism in Switzerland is already facing major financial problems”.

## “Traditional journalism in crisis”

The debate over public broadcasting comes at a time when the Swiss media industry is already facing a severe stress test. The press is already experiencing fundamental change. The key factors are cost pressure, online competition and tumbling advertising revenues. “Traditional journalism is in the midst of a major crisis,” says Silke Adam.

For a start, the internet provides an unprecedented range of information but the bigger picture and a critical approach to sources often fall by the wayside. Anyone can get whatever they want from the web. There is the risk of people getting lost in figurative echo chambers where views similar to their own reverberate loudly. This presents a danger to democratic debate. Particularly in times where there is an excessive flow of information that can be manipulated

with fake news, many people believe that a duty-conscious, structuring and guiding hand that serves the public and not powerful organisations is what is needed. Well-educated and independent journalists could perform this guardian role with well-researched articles, background reports, opinion pieces and debate conducted publicly and transparently. Such debate that provides an overview is vitally important in a direct democracy, they believe.

But the traditional media are having a hard time competing with the internet. Vast amounts of advertising revenues are being diverted into social media and algorithm-controlled platforms, such as Google and Facebook. “Advertising as the publishers’ main source of revenue is shifting away from journalism. It’s hard to refinance journalistic services today,” Adam points out. At the same time, the media is fighting against the culture of free services enjoyed by users.



## Major publisher makes drastic cuts

Switzerland still has lots of newspapers, but that does not detract from the fact that while the diversity of the press is dwindling, concentration in the media industry continues to increase apace. The three largest Swiss publishing companies today control over 80 percent of the German-speaking Swiss market. Tamedia's portfolio includes "Tages-Anzeiger", "Der Bund", "Berner Zeitung", "Sonntags Zeitung", the free newspaper "20 Minuten" and many other print titles; Ringier has "Blick", "Sonntags Blick", "Schweizer Illustrierte" and other publications and radio stations; while the NZZ Group owns the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", "NZZ am Sonntag", "Luzerner Zeitung", "St. Galler Tagblatt" and a number of radio stations.

The changes currently taking place at Tamedia are very conspicuous. It is the media group with the greatest reach in Switzerland and it is also a conglomerate. In the free commuter newspaper "20 Minuten", the company owns Switzerland's most-consumed medium. The print edition alone reaches two million readers a day. This in turn attracts advertising. The company also generates a great deal of income from address trading and web-based marketplaces, such as Homegate, Ricardo and Immostreet. In 2016, Tame-

**Tamedia has cut many jobs over recent years. This has led to repeated protests – such as one in 2016 by the editorial staff at the "24 Heures" newspaper in Lausanne.**

Photos: Keystone



**Will broadcasting from this studio soon come to an end? If the Billag licence fee is abolished, the existence of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation would hang in the balance.**



dia turned a profit of 122 million francs – more than any other media group.

While Tamedia is operating in highly lucrative areas, the traditional daily newspaper industry is struggling. The group renowned for its rigorous profit orientation is now investing very little in journalism. Instead of putting the profits into innovative media projects, the group has repeatedly responded to falling revenues from subscriptions and advertising in the same way over the past 20 years – with job cuts. This is now leading to the most extreme form of internal media concentration to date. While all of Tamedia's 14 daily titles have been retained, Swiss politics, foreign affairs, economic affairs, culture, society, background articles, science and sport will be merged into two central editorial departments – one in German-speaking Switzerland and the other in the French-speaking part of the country. Here the titles of all of the Tamedia Group's publications will be given the same layout. These measures will hit Berne particularly hard. The two Tamedia newspapers "Bund" and "Berner Zeitung" previously had a strong, independent profile, whereas in future they will practically only be differentiated by their local sections.

## The billionaire's thirst for power

In the wake of these developments, one multi-billionaire is increasingly extending his influence in the Swiss media landscape – he is Christoph Blocher, the businessman, dominant figure in the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and former Federal Councillor. Last year, he got his hands on the Zehnder Verlag publishing company. The Zehnder Verlag? Few people have heard of it, but it is nevertheless a powerful player. It has 38 titles with around 800,000 readers. These weekly newspapers are mainly circulated in the eastern part of Switzerland from Zurich to Grisons but also in the regions of Lucerne, Zug, Entlebuch, Emmental, Berne, Ob- and Nidwalden, and Aargau. Blocher has therefore not only acquired newspapers but also a distribution network which can also be used to convey political messages if need be.

Blocher has been building up his media empire for many years. With Blocher TV he has had his own TV channel for some time and the “Basler Zeitung” has been under his control for a number of years. Blocher has continually tried to gain control of the large publishing houses and newspapers – including the “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” and the tabloid “Blick” – using various means.

However, completely new, bottom-up approaches are also emerging on the media scene, which are attempting to provide journalism in Switzerland with fresh impetus – these are media outlets existing purely online. In addition to existing smaller platforms, such as “Infosperber” and “Journal 21”, “Republik” is now set to be launched – with big plans and impressive words: “Journalism is a child of the Enlightenment. Its task is to provide a critique of power. That’s why journalism is more than just a business for any corporation.” “Republik” is seeking to establish itself as an independent, digital magazine which primarily focuses on the structuring of information and in-depth research. It aims to manage without advertising revenues and to finance itself from readers alone. An annual subscription costs at least 240 francs.

It was launched in spectacular fashion with a crowdfunding campaign in April 2017. Never before had crowdfunding been so successful for a media project. Those behind “Republik” sought to raise around 750,000 francs within a month. Then came the shock news. Some 1.8 million had been contributed in the first 24 hours alone, all before the first article had even been published.

### “The Fourth Power” on the big screen

In the view of the Bernese film-maker Dieter Fahrner, this enthusiasm shows there is still a demand for guidance, structure and journalism. Fahrner worked with the Swiss media industry for around three years producing a documentary entitled “Die Vierte Gewalt” (The Fourth Power), which is due to appear in cinemas in mid-February. The film shows journalists doing their daily jobs and explores the opportunities and limits of journalism, the rapid change in the media industry and its ramifications for the public and democratic debate. Dieter Fahrner would be “delighted if the film helps to raise awareness that quality journalism takes time and costs money”.

The fact that the issue of the media has now reached cinema screens indicates its urgency and importance. For the first time, the media debate is no longer an abstract concept but something tangible that affects almost everyone. People can vote to break up or retain the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation at the ballot box. Many people will also notice from their favourite newspaper what the signs of decline mean for the press, namely higher unit costs.

Christoph Blocher, a shareholder in the “Basler Zeitung”, also acquired the Zehnder Verlag with its 38 titles last year. (Pictured: Blocher in debate with Susan Boos from the WoZ.)



“In a democracy, it’s about the general public having access to information,” as media scholar Silke Adam remarked at an event held by the information website “Infosperber”. “Well-educated people will always have this access. However, the information threshold must be kept low for everyone.” Adam does not have any panacea-like solution to the current challenges facing the media world. “But I don’t think we can do without a public service. A recent study shows that the difference in information levels between the





well-educated and those less well-educated is greater in countries with market-based media than in those where the media system is funded by a licence fee.”

### Purely market-based media or public service?

The ferocious debate currently being conducted in Switzerland concerns the future of publicly funded radio and television. The abolition of radio and television licence fees – which is what the “No Billag” initiative is calling for – would result in the currently subsidised radio and television broadcasters losing three quarters of their income. The initiative’s authors argue on their homepage that these fees are “mandatory contributions which restrict the decision-making freedom of all individuals”. Everyone should be able to decide for themselves what their hard-earned money is spent on. The “No Billag” supporters therefore want to break the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation’s “quasi-monopoly” and replace it with media competition.

They have set their sights on a media landscape which is “based purely on market economics”, writes the Federal

**The diversity of the Swiss press is dwindling, while the process of concentration in the hands of a small number of publishing companies continues apace.**

Photos: Keystone



Council in its dispatch on the popular request. And it warns: “Radio and television stations of the same quality would no longer be provided in all of the linguistic regions.” There would be no more public service, the range of opinions and services in radio and television would be reduced and high-quality journalism affected. In contrast, the current system guarantees electronic media which contributes to the successful democratic formation of informed opinion and cultural development. The Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, as a body independent of political and economic interests, is obliged to guarantee a diverse range of services which also takes account of the interests of minority groups.

### Ferocious exchanges in Parliament

It is not just the Federal Council but also Parliament that is unequivocally opposed to the initiative. So far the only support for the proposal in the debate has come from the ranks of the Swiss People’s Party (SVP). SVP National Councillor Lukas Reimann has dubbed the licence fee a “rip-off” and his parliamentary group colleague Claudio Zanetti has accused the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation of being loyal to the government, EU-friendly and too left-wing in its coverage. The SVP’s Thomas Müller has called the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation a “licence-fee-funded opinion-shaper”.

The broad coalition opposed to the initiative takes the exact opposite view. National Councillor Ida Glanzmann of the Christian Democratic People’s Party (CVP) argues that opinion would be influenced and manipulated if the media were controlled exclusively by private players. Matthias Aebischer of the Swiss Social Democratic Party (SP) even warns of a “Berlusconi-like situation” arising in Switzerland, in other words media concentration in the hands of billionaires. If the initiative is approved, the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation would also be less appealing to advertisers due to its diminished reach, and foreign TV advertising windows, Google and Facebook would benefit, according to Roger Nordmann, the leader of the SP parlia-

### AZ Medien and the NZZ Group merge their regional titles

Just before going to print, we received news that AZ Medien and the NZZ-Mediengruppe plan to merge their regional titles and create a company that brings 20 paid-for newspapers in 13 cantons together under one roof. The new company aims to become the number 1 in German-speaking Switzerland. And indeed if you put together the regional titles of the two publishing companies, they extend from eastern Switzerland across central Switzerland as far as Solothurn, covering most of German-speaking Switzerland. The merger still has to be approved by the Competition Commission.

mentary group. Regula Rytz, President of the Greens, believes the popular request is “purely destructive” and undermines “direct democracy”. CVP National Councillor Viola Amherd believes it is ultimately about a piece of Switzerland. The initiative does not just jeopardise the independence of information, but also the mutual understanding of the linguistic regions and urban and rural parts of the country. Peripheral regions and linguistic minorities are greatly affected.

A key argument is that no private media company could provide high-quality radio and television programmes for all regions on an economically viable basis in such a small country as Switzerland where such tremendous linguistic and cultural diversity exists. This can only be achieved by the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation which collects around 70 percent of its fees in German-speaking Switzerland but only spends 45 percent of them there. The remainder is used to cross-subsidise the parts of Switzerland where French, Italian and Romansh are spoken. The revenues are distributed so that the minorities benefit from the majority. French-speaking, Italian-speaking and Romansh-speaking Switzerland have a similar type of service to German-speaking Switzerland. That is the principle of a nation forged by the will of the people applied to journalism.

## Heterogeneous opposition to the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation

The “No Billag” supporters contend that the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation has become too powerful in the media industry, leaving too little room for private companies. The SBC is indeed a giant organisation by Swiss standards. It has grown enormously since its foundation in 1931, today has around 6,000 employees and runs 17 radio and 7 television stations as well as online services and swissinfo in 10 world languages. That makes the SBC the biggest electronic media company in Switzerland. It receives annual revenues of 1.65 billion francs, with 75 % of its funding coming from fees and 25 % from commercial activities.

The nostalgic image of the erstwhile national stations “Beromünster”, “Sottens” and “Monte Ceneri” has long been consigned to the past. Any organisation the size of the SBC today will also face enemies. The emphatic rejection of the “No Billag” initiative in Parliament is therefore not a reliable barometer of the mood amongst the Swiss people. Opinion seems divided at the very least. On the one hand, the SBC programmes usually seem to score well in the ratings and opinion polls and enjoy considerable support, particularly the factual shows. On the other, the “No Billag” initiative may benefit from the extremely heterogeneous opposition to the SBC. To begin with, there is the SVP, which has

a broken relationship with the SBC. It and the conservatives still believe the SBC has a left-wing bias. Criticism is not just levelled at the SBC over political and ideological issues but also over economic ones. The SBC is also a thorn in the side of some publishing companies. Publishers are calling for the rescaling of the SBC and for it to refrain from providing specifically web-based services.

## Throwing the baby out with the bathwater

The SBC’s programmes are seen by millions of people each day. Obviously not everyone agrees on the type of radio and television services provided. Criticism of media content is not just legitimate but also necessary and helps to improve quality standards. The “No Billag” referendum may nevertheless lead many people to express their dissatisfaction with individual programmes at the ballot box by voting yes, thus throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Then, of course, there are all those whose support can easily be won with the “compulsory fee” argument – especially young people who often only get their information online and have grown up with free media.

Not least in light of the fight for survival of the press, which is taking place at the same time, approval of the initiative would bring about a revolution in media policy. Switzerland would become the only country in Europe without public broadcasting. The initiative’s authors say that the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation is not the issue but rather the abolition of the compulsory licence fee. The SBC is not mentioned in the text of the initiative. It could continue to produce and broadcast programmes after the abolition of the Billag fees, but it would simply have to finance these activities itself in the same way as most other companies. But it is arguably an illusion to think that the current scope and quality of the SBC’s services could be funded purely on a commercial basis. The reality would look rather different. The abolition of the fees and the effective break-up of the SBC in its current form would leave the market open to media players with large amounts of capital available, and also, above all, to internet giants headquartered abroad.

The example of the USA shows where the path of a media system with no licence fees leads. Radio and television stations there are highly commercialised and political and in many cases outright propaganda machines – fostering the polarisation of society and undermining the basis of democracy and the search for consensus. Roger de Weck, former SBC Director General, said at an event last year that such a situation could also arise in Switzerland due to the lack of funding for journalism. This would create a political landscape where “ever more political forces no longer support the basic principles of the Enlightenment” and are trying to gain control over those media that still adhere to these fundamental values.



## “The most significant bill of the legislative term”

A referendum on a new financial regime is being held on 4 March.

JÜRIG MÜLLER

This is a crucially important vote and, according to Finance Minister Ueli Maurer, “probably the most important bill of the legislative term”. But for once all political parties are in agreement: the referendum on 4 March concerns the new financial regime from 2021 onwards. Unless this bill is approved, the Swiss Confederation will run out of money. The bill aims to ensure the federal budget can continue to rely on income from direct federal taxes and VAT. The current financial regime expires in 2020.

One of Swiss federalism’s unique traits is that the federal tax system is always only valid for a limited period of time. It is now set to be extended until 2035. The Federal

Council initially wanted to amend the federal financial regime to allow it to levy both taxes without any time limitation. However, there was opposition during the consultation procedure and it is now only set to be extended by 15 years. The main argument is that making the taxes subject to time limits and a referendum puts them on a more legitimate democratic basis.

Direct federal taxes and VAT are federal government’s two main sources of income and make up over 60 % of total federal finances. As the new 2021 financial regime officially requires an amendment to the federal constitution, it must be approved at referendum by the Swiss people as well as the cantons.

### Alain Berset must now show stamina

24 September could have provided an early overture to Federal Councillor Alain Berset’s presidential year. However, as the Swiss people rejected the far-reaching pension reform put to them that day, he now has to deal with the controversy over stabilising the old-age pension system during his year as President of the Swiss Confederation.

MARKUS BROTSCHI

Until now Alain Berset had been achieving things more quickly than usual in Swiss politics. The French-speaking Swiss from Belfaux in the canton of Fribourg was elected to the Council of States at the age of 31 and to the Federal Council aged 39. After six years in office it is now his turn to take up the presidency and, at 45, he is still the youngest member of national government by some margin.

With Berset, a new generation of social democratic politicians entered national government in 2010. He represents left-wing politics without ideological undertones and is a great pragmatist and tactician. He cuts a finer figure in a suit and tie than some conservative members of government. Berset, who paid his way as a bar pianist during a gap year in Brazil after sitting his school-leaving exams, has brought dynamism to the Federal Council.

#### Quick-witted but not aloof

Berset was predestined for the official engagements that are part and parcel of his year as President. He always strikes the right tone, is charming and quick-witted but never aloof. He enjoys meeting the public, is an excellent communicator and is also popular with the younger generation. Pupils from a vocational school who were in the audience of Swiss television’s “Arena” show on pension reform swarmed around the federal councillor for a selfie after the broadcast.

The French-speaking native of Fribourg is equally comfortable on the international and domestic stage, whether it is the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, the Locarno Film Festival or, as in 2017, the Swiss yodelling festival. Visits to the WEF and the Winter Olympic Games in South Korea are scheduled for the presidential year. He will also receive the heads of government from the German-speaking countries for a joint meeting in Switzerland.

In Switzerland, the President remains head of his department first and foremost. Here Berset faces two issues which need to be dealt with urgently – health insurance and the old-age pension system. After his election six years ago, the crucially important Federal Department of Home Affairs was returned to SP hands after two Free Democrat federal councillors had spent nine years grappling with rising health insurance premiums and the fallout of demographic change. Berset has proven himself a resourceful head of department with great drive who wants to tackle reform head-on rather than procrastinating. His ambitious plan entailed the simultaneous reform of the first and second pillars and he almost succeeded in pulling it off. If he had he would have created history. However, he failed to break the 20-year deadlock over old-age pension after falling short by a few percentage points and being unable to secure the support of the majority of the cantons on 24 September 2017.

#### Facing the reality of Swiss politics on the ground

After the failed attempt at pension reform, Berset now faces the reality of Swiss politics on the ground where grand schemes rarely come off and success requires painstaking detail. The former top middle-distance runner, who specialised in the 800 metres, now has to show the stamina of a long-distance athlete to get the new proposal for urgently needed pension reform on track and to push it through Parliament and a referendum.

He may sometimes wish that he could have moved across to the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs after Didier Burkhalter’s retirement. He certainly has the profile required as he once successfully completed the selection procedure for training in the diplomatic corps. But Berset’s party would never have forgiven him for handing over control of social policy to Ignazio Cassis, the new FDP federal councillor.

Right-wing MPs will have been delighted by Berset’s referendum defeat not just due to their views on the issue itself but also because Berset is one of the strongest figures on the Federal Council. When Cassis was asked about the social democrat two years ago, the former leader of the FDP parliamentary group replied: “He is a damned good federal councillor, which is unfortunate for conservative politicians.” The state plays a key role in Berset’s politics but he is certainly no “left-wing ideologist”.

MARKUS BROTSCHI IS THE FEDERAL POLITICAL AFFAIRS EDITOR FOR THE “TAGES-ANZEIGER” AND “DER BUND”.

# Good flying conditions, but only for the big players

Business is booming for the major airlines thanks to huge demand – including in Switzerland where Swiss has posted a profit. But small airlines are currently fighting for survival.

STEFAN SCHUPPLI

The airline industry is enjoying an all-time high. The International Air Transport Association estimates that the industry generated profits of CHF 34.5 billion worldwide in 2017. Losses have not been posted once in any of the past eight years. That is extraordinary. Business is also booming in Switzerland. Swiss, the market leader here, has reached new heights. This is due to strong demand, on the one hand, and new, more cost-effective and larger aircraft on the other.

The Boeing 777 is used for long-haul flights and for short-haul the CSeries 100 and 300, a completely new development from the Canadian manufacturer Bombardier. The number of seats sold on aircraft has risen to well over 80 % – which is one of the reasons why Swiss has now become a highly profitable cash cow in the Lufthansa group. Operating profit may come in at over CHF 500 million for 2017. You have to go well back to the days of the company's predecessor Swissair to find such high profit levels.

## Swiss versus easyJet

Swiss may well be more expensive than foreign competitors. Customers are nevertheless clearly willing to pay the ticket prices that enable such a profit to be turned. The strong competition is admittedly keeping Swiss in check. easyJet Switzerland, a subsidiary of the British low-cost airline bearing the same name, is the second-largest carrier in the country. easyJet flies under a Swiss operating licence and has 14 Airbuses permanently based in Geneva and nine in Ba-



Swiss is flying high. Its operating profit is set to exceed CHF 500 million for 2017. Photo: Keystone

sel. At the bi-national Euro Airport serving the Basel region, the company is even the clear market leader with a market share of around 60 %.

It is fascinating to see how the business models of easyJet and Swiss have increasingly aligned in the short-haul market. easyJet previously adopted a model based on simplicity – no transfer traffic, no extra services and the lowest prices whenever possible. This stance has gradually softened. easyJet has, for example, introduced categories of seating in the cabin. Passengers sitting at the front or in seats with more legroom pay more. Changeable tickets are really expensive, even with easyJet. The airline hopes this category will attract more business customers requiring flexible travel times. Conversely, Swiss, which tends to be more expensive, has launched extremely low-price deals to avoid being squeezed out of the market, particularly in Geneva where Swiss is in direct competition with easyJet.

### Edelweiss increases the size of its fleet

It is not just Swiss and easyJet who are performing well at the moment, Edelweiss Air is too. The only Swiss “leisure travel airline” – as it calls itself – is a sister company of Swiss, so it is also part of the Lufthansa group and cooperates closely with Swiss. It will add five aeroplanes to its fleet this year, taking the total to 15. There are three classes of seat on long-haul flights – Eco, Eco Plus and Business.

However, there are also examples of companies struggling. Air Berlin and Darwin Air from Lugano, which

Swiss airlines (as at the end of 2017)		
	Employees	Aircraft
Swiss	9100 *	75
Edelweiss Air	670	10
easyJet Switzerland	550/340 **	14/9 **
Skywork	100	4

\* End of 2016 \*\*Geneva/Basel

went into liquidation last year, illustrate that survival cannot be taken for granted even in a strong economy. Air Berlin, which operated several routes to Switzerland and also had aircraft based in Zurich, suffered from the lack of a clear business profile coupled with notoriously high costs. The upshot was firstly administration proceedings and then the withdrawal of its operating licence. The name Darwin, which alludes to the fight for survival in nature, became a symbolic beacon for the small airline from Ticino which belonged to the Air Adria group. Darwin Air was founded in 2003 after Swiss removed Lugano from its network of routes. Ironically, Darwin also later abandoned the destination of Lugano as part of restructuring measures. Its operational hub was in Geneva and its headquarters in Lugano.

### Last-minute salvation

Berne-based Skywork was in a perilous situation last autumn. Undaunted, the small airline from Berne is attempting to develop regular services but the lack of infrastructure – small hangars for maintenance work and no blind landing facilities in the event of poor weather conditions – mean it is working under tight constraints. And

aeroplanes with fewer than 50 seats are barely financially viable with current pricing structures.

Skywork only narrowly escaped closure when the Federal Office of Civil Aviation demanded additional financial guarantees. Last autumn, an investor was apparently found at the last minute to save the company. It is likely to operate more from Euro Airport in Basel in future. The aircraft operated by Skywork flew out of Basel once before around 20 years ago, when they belonged to Crossair’s large fleet of Saab 2000s.

### Ever more air travellers

2018 should be another good year for flying. The economy is picking up in more or less all parts of the world, creating a very good climate for airlines. The sector association IATA estimates that the number of air travellers will increase by around 6 % in 2018, which means that 4.3 billion people will board an aeroplane this year.

The increasing demand also means that Swiss is set to continue growing. Before the end of the year, the airline announced at its annual press conference that it would create around 550 new jobs by the end of 2018.

## It's boom time for the "Davos sledge"

The small wooden sledges were originally intended for transporting goods. Then a carpenter launched the "Davos sports sledge". The museum-piece mode of transport has since been a fundamental part of Swiss wintertime. Carpenters like Paul Burri are keeping the tradition alive.

MARC LETTAU

It gets quite cramped in Paul Burri's small carpentry workshop in Lohnstorf, canton of Berne, at the start of winter. Everything is geared towards one thing – sledges. Sawn wooden parts lie ready in one corner. In another, finished sledges are stacked almost up to the ceiling. Outside, the little street where Burri works and lives is covered in snow. It is the same little street that Burri raced down on a sledge with his brothers during his childhood. The local authority's road patrol used to spray gravel on the hardened snow to make the surface safe. But the Burri boys made themselves a plough to get rid of the speed-curbing grit and carried on sledging. Now, over 50 years later, Paul Burri is the local sledge-maker.

It is not just Burri who has childhood memories of sledging, as it plays a part in almost everyone's childhood in Switzerland. At the first sign of snow, children slide or tumble down the nearest suitable hill on their wooden toboggans accompanied by parents or grandparents who did exactly the same thing in their day. These sledges are often the "Davos" model. This archetypal Swiss wooden sledge has not changed through all the generations.

### Ash is mandatory

The omnipresence of this sledge is down to Burri and a dozen or so other firms across the country. They are continuing the craft of sledge-making and know exactly what makes a good sledge. It must be made of ash. This wood is hard, tough, long-stranded and elastic. This means the sledge's



runners bend well and the seat slats give without breaking.

Burri is a carpenter, but every sledge-maker is also a bit of a chef. A saucepan is used in the production of the sledge's runners which are bent

upwards. At least Burri makes it sound like what goes on in a kitchen: "The wooden parts used for the runners are cooked for an hour in wet steam at 150 degrees Celsius." The parts are then bent and attached. When they have

**The carpenter Paul Burri makes 200 to 300 sledges in his small workshop each year.**

Photos: Adrian Moser

cooled down and dried out again, the curve remains in place. However, no one piece of wood is exactly the same as the next. This means that every curve – and each sledge – is slightly different.

## Original regional variants

The straight-line “Davos” model is regarded as the original wooden sledge. In addition, there are a host of original regional variants as many mountain regions produced their own typical sledges during the course of the 19th century. As well as the Davos sledge, the Grindelwald model is still commonplace. The Bergün, Goldiwil and Grönland (from Alp Grön in the Jostal valley) models are also well-known types.

Year after year, Burri provides evidence that nothing changes in the world of traditional sledges. Or does it? What about all the smooth frames made of plastic or the ultra-modern, steerable and rapid sports sledges known as luges? “The original is doing fine,” says Burri. He is aware of the modern trends and even builds a “sportier model” himself. The tried-and-tested model still gives him the most pleasure though. He has nevertheless accepted one of the obvious changes. Originally the sledge’s main use was to transport small loads through snow-covered villages. Today, it is used for recreational purposes.

The modernists on the sledging scene shake their heads in disbelief at the sheer number of basic “Davos” sledges and similar models still being crafted by hand. They look on sledgers using the hard-to-steer “Davos” model as die-hards stuck in the past. One thing is certainly true. Users of traditional wooden sledges rarely get an adrenaline rush. Yet travelling over the white winter wonderland with the spray of snow in your face can provide a true sense of happiness. Sledge-maker Burri believes the power of this



### A Swiss classic

The 80 to 130-centimetre-long wooden sledge with the engraved inscription “Davos” is a Swiss classic. Its name dates back to the first historic sledge race of 1883 in Davos which also led to the foundation of the British-dominated “Davos Toboggan Club”. Davos wainwrights made the first sledges for tourists before that. In 1888, Tobias Branger, a pioneer of skiing, unveiled his “Davos sports sledge”, creating the original prototype of the “Davos” model which is still used today. mul

tradition contributes to its lasting success. Children have also grown up with basic sledges and not sophisticated racing machines. The drawback of the “Davos” sledge also works in its favour: “The fact that it doesn’t go so fast means it’s less dangerous.”

## 120 managed sledge runs

In Switzerland, almost two million people use sledge runs in winter, in other words, one of over 120 prepared tracks running for kilometres. The number of these commercial runs is on the rise, and they are ever more impressive. The longest sledge run in the world, at 15 kilometres, has a view of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau and goes from Faulhorn through Bussalp to Grindelwald. It goes without saying that commercial providers have long since discovered and ensnared the seemingly anachronistic sledgers. But sledging is also booming beyond the runs on practically all snow-covered hills that are steep enough.

Has Paul Burri noticed this boom? He makes 200 to 300 sledges each year. This winter the figure stands at over 1,000. He modestly puts this down to

“good fortune” as a single large order has driven numbers up. But the other sledge-makers across the country are not complaining either. As well as traditionalists like Burri, some firms are launching an exclusive small-scale series production of luxury sledges with brass fittings. The “made in Davos” model is also experiencing a boom. Sledge-making there had ground to a halt in 1954. But a native of Arosa, Paul Ardüser, has now entered the market again. Switzerland’s biggest manufacturer, 3R AG in Sulgen, sells up to 5,000 sledges of all kinds each season. Erwin Dreier, the chief executive of 3R, does not believe the “Davos” sledge will be squeezed out of the market: “It’s ultimately part of Swiss heritage,” he says.

Back to Paul Burri. He works with the pride of a craftsman who knows that he can make a sledge “entirely on his own”. He carefully saws the bowed wooden parts which have now dried out again into two halves to produce two identically curved runners. He selects attractive wood for the frame of the sledge placed between the runners and the seat. He cuts the slats to length with a good eye. He bends the steel guides with a steady hand and screws them onto the wooden runners. One sledge after another is produced in this way. The pile of sledges in the little workshop continues to grow. Standing by this pile, Burri remarks: “There’ll always be sledges.”

The sledges – a museum-piece mode of transport – have also rubbed off on the man who creates them. Burri favours an old-fashioned way of doing things. Does he sell his top-notch products online? Not a chance. Can people order sledges from him by email? No, they cannot. People know where he is: “They can find me here in Lohnstorf.” Customers have to knock on the door of the small carpentry workshop in the little street which Burri used to slide down as a child.

# The Gurlitt legend lives on

The works of art have now arrived – the Museum of Fine Arts Berne is exhibiting the controversial legacy of Cornelius Gurlitt, a deceased art collector from Munich. More significant than its aesthetic appeal is the furore caused in the art world by this purported “Nazi treasure trove”.

DANIEL DI FALCO

“Would visitors to the Gurlitt exhibition kindly leave all bags in the cloakroom?”, “Please wait here until the next member of staff is available,” and “Thank you for your patience.” At times the line of visitors stretches outside the entrance door. The route that the queue has to follow to the cash desk is a clear indication that the “Gurlitt collection” is an exhibition like no other.

Four years have passed since “Focus” magazine unearthed the “Nazi treasure trove” and three have gone by since the Museum of Fine Arts Berne accepted the unexpected inheritance. The son of German art dealer Hildebrand Gurlitt, Cornelius Gurlitt, who passed away in Munich at the age of 81, bequeathed the “treasure trove” to the museum in Switzerland which, according to “Focus” magazine, included no fewer than 1,500 “missing works of art” with an estimated value of over € 1 billion. The affair became a scandal. It sparked rumours and controversy worldwide over stolen art and the integrity of collectors, dealers, museums and the authorities. It also led to a protracted court case over the validity of the will.

## Value lowered by experts

So, a lot happening before a single picture was hung on a wall. Nobody is referring to it as “treasure” any more – the experts involved in the Swiss-German exhibition and research project are even steering clear of the word “collection”. Instead they are using terms like “art trove”, “cache of artworks” or simply “cache”. The clearer the contents became, the more realistic the appraisal of the legacy’s significance – that is to say it was lowered.

Much of what is on display in Berne is in fact on paper. Gurlitt senior mainly collected drawings, watercolours and prints. He had a passion for German Expressionism and artists like Otto Dix, George Grosz and Max Beckmann. This legacy supplements the existing collection of the Berne institution – it has not been given its own museum. But that doesn’t explain the long queues to the cash desk for this special exhibition.

The legend of the “missing Nazi treasure” lives on. Such claims are in fact unfounded – the paintings were the perfectly legal private property of a private citizen and suspicions of stolen art have only been confirmed in the case of six out of 1,500 items. The museum in Berne and the Bundeskunsthalle in Bonn – which are now working together to clarify the matter – are clearly benefiting from this PR effect. Along with such advantages, there are also challenges presented by the historical context of the works which is currently overshadowing the aesthetic appeal of the art. The Bonn exhibition focuses on the art theft of the Nazi dictatorship while the one in Berne explores the ostracism of the genre of modern art dubbed as “degenerate” by the Nazis. Cornelius Gurlitt’s father Hildebrand played a more than ambivalent role here. He believed in the art which the Nazis wanted to remove from the face of the Earth. At the same time, he helped them as a dealer and liquidator of the regime.

## Advised against inheritance contract

In 2014, federal government advised the Bernese against entering into an inheritance contract with Germany because this would introduce

a tighter definition of art theft here which had applied in Germany until then but not Switzerland. This definition was not restricted to art stolen by the Nazis from private owners, but also covered art that their victims were forced to sell due to persecution. The Bernese signed anyway and federal government is today hailing it as an “exemplary” approach. It now also contributes when museums want to conduct in-depth research into the origins of their artworks. It did not want to do that either initially.

On the very day when the special exhibition opened in Berne, a case resurfaced in Basel which actually seemed to have been resolved. In 2008, the Kunstmuseum Basel had turned away the heirs of Hermann Glaser. They had laid claim to 120 works from the museum’s collection. Glaser, a Jewish museum director in Berlin, had to auction his private collection before fleeing in 1933.

The Basel museum argued that that auction was a legitimate sale and therefore not art theft. They refused to accept Glaser’s desperate plight – in other words, “persecution-related dispossession” – and are now receiving criticism for their stance. This also illustrates that the Gurlitt case has actually set a new benchmark, if not legally, then morally.

The Museum of Fine Arts Berne is showing the Gurlitt exhibition on “degenerate art” until 4 March, and subsequently the exhibition on stolen art from the Bundeskunsthalle Bonn.



“Degenerate Art” from Cornelius Gurlitt’s collection: “Leonie” by Otto Dix, an expressionistic colour lithograph from 1923.

Photo: Museum of Fine Arts Berne



# Äppelvik between the old and new worlds

Basel-born Felix Moeschlin highlighted the dangers of overhasty modernisation in his novel “Amerika-Johann” using the example of a Swedish village.

CHARLES LINSMAYER

“I’m surrounded by nature day and night. I arrived here two weeks ago but it feels as though I’ve been living in this forest for years. Haven’t I always been here?” Felix Moeschlin, who wrote this in the NZZ in 1908, fell in love with Sweden. He lived there from 1908 to 1914 and met the painter Elsa Hamar, who would become the mother of his three children. This is also where the author from Basel, born in 1882, chose to set his third novel entitled “Der Amerika-Johann”, which followed his rustic novel “Die Königschmieds”, set in his local Leimental valley, and the artistic novel “Hermann Hitz”.

## An astute homecomer

The setting is the rural village of Äppelvik, behind which lies Leksand on Lake Siljan, where Moeschlin built his own house single-handedly. This is where his character “Amerika-Johann” returns home to after many years to open up the modern world to villagers through a sawmill, shop and new financing strategies. All goes well until the hastily launched business venture collapses and the farmers sell their farms to the charlatan for a pittance for a project which is something akin to a Swedish version of Ballenberg, where ancient traditions are reduced to profit-making folklore for affluent tourists from all over the world. Only when it emerges that the new owner plans to sell the farms he has amassed to a dubious millionaire do the farmers stir from their lethargy, unceremoniously beat the strange prophet to death and face the consequences of the murder – the adults end up in prison while the young have to rebuild this corrupted community based on proven methods but also by embracing moderate change.

## Retaining the farming community

Had Moeschlin not possessed such clear insight into Sweden and its culture, Äppelvik could have been replaced with Zermatt or Grindelwald. The author of the novel “Amerika-Johann”, which was well received in Switzerland in 1912, was a top appointment when he became director of the resort of Arosa in 1915. And not just there but also in his later roles as a columnist on the “Basler Nationalzeitung”, as the

editor of the “Zürcher Tat” and as the National Councillor for Landesring, maintaining a vibrant farming community was just as important to him as keeping up with new developments.

In 1934, he sought to combat unemployment in Switzerland by setting up a farming cooperative in Brazil, and in 1949 illustrated in the two-volume book entitled “Wir durchbohren den Gotthard” (Tunnelling through the Gotthard) how the high-risk project of the first Gotthard Tunnel, which claimed many lives, ultimately proved a blessing for the nation. The fact that Moeschlin – who was President of the Swiss Literature Society from 1924 to 1942 and died in Basel in 1969 – played a significant role in many of his fellow authors, who had fled from Hitler, being prohibited to work or deported during the Second World War is one of the darker chapters in this author’s life.

However, in “Amerika-Johann”, his most successful novel, he managed to combine the struggle between old and new worlds, which also had far-reaching ramifications for Switzerland, with an inspirational homage to Sweden.

Bibliography: “Der Amerika-Johann” was last published in 1981 with an epilogue by Egon Wilhelm in the Ex Libris series “Frühling der Gegenwart” and is available second-hand.



“What farmers owned in the past was inherited and not chosen or desired. They were farmers because their fathers had been farmers. That is why their very existence was so easily shaken. We choose our lives, and they are not governed by duty and custom but rather by curiosity, enjoyment and enthusiasm.”

From: Felix Moeschlin: “Der Amerika-Johann”. A novel. Ex Libris-Verlag 1981. (out of print)

CHARLES LINSMAYER IS A LITERARY SCHOLAR AND JOURNALIST IN ZÜRICH

# Swiss rap is hip again in Geneva but poetic rather than political

The suburbs of Geneva have produced a group of young rappers whose lyrics are significant on an existential level. The group's leading light, Makala, has now been signed by a major French label. The era of political criticism by rappers like Stress is over.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Last summer, a group of rappers from Geneva appeared on stage at the Frauenfeld rap festival alongside star names from America, like Gucci Mane and Nas. Their style of rap? A “flow” with occasional existential undertones. “Seeing local stars like Makala appear at this major festival was fantastic,” says Hadrien Mauron, an 18-year-old student from Geneva. A huge fan of American rap, who listens to two new albums a day, Mauron believes that Geneva's Superwak Clique collective “are showing young people in French-speaking Switzerland that you can reach for the stars from humble beginnings”. The emergence of Makala, who is the driving force behind the group and has been signed by the major French label BMG, could also have been predicted. With his friends he has performed at venues in Paris, Marseilles, Brussels and London.

Malaka, Pink Flamingo, Di-Meh and Slimka for the younger fans, and also Williman, Basengo and the Valais-based rapper KT Gorique all represent this new rap movement from French-speaking Switzerland which is making waves on the international scene thanks to a style that is deemed accessible. “It's not the socially conscious rap of the 1990s that refers to all the suffering that French hip-hop expresses, but a more lyrically sophisticated and personal form of rap,” explains Thibault Eigenmann, who co-founded the independent Colors record label with his partner Theo Lacroix. It produces the music of a number of the Superwak Clique artists. In Switzerland, people remember the rap music of Stress and Sens Unik, whose lyrics were extremely political at times.

## Rap about reflective souls

One example of a sensitive track is “Piscine privée (Private Pool)” by Makala, in which the narrator explores his conscience. “*Dans ma piscine privée, j'aime quand elle nage, j'suis là, j'la surveille, pour pas qu'elle se noie* (In my private pool, I love it when she swims, I'm there watching her so she doesn't drown)”, raps the young man with Congolese roots, who grew up in Les Avanchets in the suburbs of Geneva. On “Pink Flamingo”, a homage to a local producer of the same name, the rapper depicts a night-time scene. “*La gue-dro (drogue) est aux commandes; les p'tits reufs (frères) sont mal guidés; les daronnes (mères) sont fatiguées; quand t'es dans ton lit, y'a des SDF habités; d'la farine dans les*

*cavités. (Drugs rule, the brothers are misguided, their mothers are exhausted, when you're in your bed, the homeless are housed and there's powder in the cavities)*”.

Thibault Eigenmann, who does not believe that rap should be written down (and never provides the lyrics to tracks), is nevertheless willing to analyse them: “The track describes what happens at night. When Makala says the homeless are housed, it's an oxymoron that expresses the notion that not everyone is necessarily on the road to ruin.”

## Take control of your own life

Born in 1993 and having grown up in Onex, another suburb of Geneva, Williman encourages young people to create their own worlds. In his track “Genève, on dit quoi? (Geneva, What Do You Say?)”, the rapper depicts “*ténèbres, où les gens courent à la lueur du diamant* (a bleak world where people chase the sparkle of diamonds)”. You have to get by here on your own. “*J'ai créé mon propre business dans ce bas monde. Aux armes, je pars en guerre, passez-moi l'arbalète. Dans les grandes surfaces on est mal vus, ouais mon pote Albanais, hier je faisais dans le vol, aujourd'hui je fais dans le vocal. Les classes supérieures me prennent de haut* (I've set up my own business in this lowly world. Get your weapons, I'm going to war, pass me the crossbow. They don't like us in the big stores, yes my Albanian friend, yesterday I was stealing, today I'm using my voice. The upper classes look down on me)”, intones the artist from Geneva, whose mother comes from Cameroon, with anger.

Basengo, who has Rwandan roots, is another artist who has been signed by Colors. “He calls on everyone to take control of their own life and not live a life devoid of meaning,” says Eigenmann. In “Ground Zero”, the rap artist describes a Geneva with empty bodies and a parade of carcasses. He warns his peers: “*Fais gaffe. On investit dans ce qui est rentable seul assis à une trop grande taille. Et ton cœur tombe en panne, c'est le piège de l'opulence. A rester trop prudent le temps nous entaille* (Watch out. They only invest in what's profitable and on a large scale. Your heart's worn out, it's the trap of opulence. Keep safe, as time catches up with us).”

The issue of cultural diversity is also tackled. The performer Aurélie Djee raps about “*le loup, le renard, l'arbalète, le couscous et la fondue* (the wolf, the fox, the crossbow, the couscous and the fondue)”. “*A l'aise dans mes baskets j'ai pas de gri-gri* (In my comfortable sneak-



Makala is one of the new stars of the Swiss hip-hop scene. His rap is the product of Geneva's suburbs. Photo: Keystone

ers, I ain't got no gris-gris)", she tells us. The Valais-based Métis artist KT Gorique, who won the world rap freestyle championships in 2012 in New York, talks about rootlessness and racism "with even greater intensity, as being a foreigner in Valais is not necessarily easy", points out the producer from Geneva. In "Vision nocturne (Night Vision)" she says: *"J'arrête quelqu'un dans la rue, une fois sur deux, j'sens sa méfiance. La Suisse ne connaît pas son histoire, s'en tape de celle des autres. Vote pour chasser l'immigrant sauf s'il transpire dans un maillot. J'habite en Valley, p't'être que c'est l'endroit parfait pour en parler. Des guerres non déclarées entre villes, villages et mêmes quartiers. T'aimes pas ton voisin, dur d'accepter l'étranger. (I feel the distrust of every other person I stop in the street. Switzerland doesn't know its own history and doesn't give a damn about other people's. They voted to get rid of immigrants unless they wear a football jersey. I live in the valley which is perhaps the ideal place to talk about it. Undeclared wars between towns, villages and even districts. If you don't love your neighbours, it's hard to accept foreigners)".*

## A high number of foreigners

Does this wave of rap have any specifically Swiss traits? Thibault Eigenmann believes that it is the product of Geneva's suburbs. He stresses that these estates do not experience the endemic problems and violence experienced by some French suburbs, which are described in French rap. However, he reveals that the families of the artists whose work he produces have sometimes had to fight to escape it. "Switzerland provides high-quality state education," he says, before describing the distinctive environment of the suburbs, which have an extremely high number of foreigners. "Children whose parents speak a foreign language and who grow up in multicultural environments have slightly different language and express themselves in edgier ways. This may be because they are not sure what they are saying, so pronounce words more emphatically. I think that's why young peo-

ple from the estates are more likely to rap than those from more affluent parts of town".

The lyrics penned by the Superwak Clique rappers sometimes borrow from clichés from American gangsta rap, but are not based on an ultra-violent reality. "The cover of Gun Love Fiction, Makala's album released in 2017, shows a handgun pointed at someone's head. It's a violent image, but also a cinematographic depiction of violence, used to discuss our society's ills and achievements," states the co-founder of the Colors label. The fact that rap from French-speaking Switzerland is more objective means that it can be exported to France and other French-speaking countries. "These rappers are like big fish in a small pond," says Hadrien Mauron, who occasionally bumps into artists from this scene at the McDonald's on the corner.

## The political rappers

French-speaking Switzerland has a history of political rap. For example, in 1993, Sens Unik, a band from Lausanne that was a key part of the emerging French hip-hop scene, shared its view of the nation in "L'île au trésor (Treasure Island)": *"Il existe une île au trésor. Un pays fantasmagorique qui n'est autre qu'un coffre fort. Où sont dissimulées des montagnes de pièces d'or coulées par des âmes sanguinaires dans les moules de la mort (There's a treasure island. A fantasy land which is nothing but a vault. Where there are hidden mountains of gold coins cast by bloodthirsty souls in moulds of death)".* In 2003, Stress, a rapper from Lausanne, attacked the Swiss People's Party in "Fuck Blocher": *"Ce pays si prospère a voté pour la peur. Comment un pays aussi multiculturel que la Suisse accepte au Conseil fédéral Blocher, ce raciste. Le blème, c'est que les jeunes ça les botte pas donc ils ne votent pas (This country that's so wealthy voted for fear. How can a nation as multicultural as Switzerland elect this racist Blocher to the Federal Council. The problem is that young people don't care, so they don't vote)".*

# Perfect timing

Martina Hingis reached the top in tennis at a young age, experienced the lows of a doping scandal and eventually rose again. Now she has hung up her racket.

ANDREAS W. SCHMID

Martina Hingis spent another four years jetting around the world. Switzerland's most famous female sports star once again revelled in the tennis circus and all the luxuries, success and applause that go with it but made the surprise decision to call time on her career at the end of October. It is not the first time she has retired but there is no doubt that it is for good this time and there will be no more comebacks.



“It had to happen at some point,” she reflected, which sounds understandable. During her career, the 37-year-old has experienced all the highs and lows that fate held in store for her and has come through them. She recently returned to the number 1 spot in the world rankings in the doubles game. That brought things full circle. Hingis entered the big stage as a teenager wearing braces in 1994 and got off to a brilliant start. And 23 years on she has reached the pinnacle of the game again, now as the grande dame on the tennis circuit. That is how great sportspeople end their careers. “It’s the perfect time,” Hingis herself remarked.

## The youngest number 1 at the age of 16

When she retired the first time around in 2003, it was too early. From a young age, she and her mother and trainer Melanie Molitor had completely dedicated her life to the global sport. While there were indications at an early stage that an extremely rare talent was emerging in the Rhine Valley, her breakthrough at the top level was certainly no matter of course. Would she crumble under the tremendous expectations placed on her shoulders? Not Hingis. She became the youngest world number 1 at the age of just 16. Over the following years she played in many matches which have gone down in tennis history. There was the unforgettable moment in the final of the French Open in 1999 when she impudently breached tennis etiquette by marching onto Steffi Graf’s side of the court to check whether the ball had really

gone out. After the defeat and whistling from the crowd, she was devastated but can laugh about it today: “At that age you do things that you shouldn’t.”

Despite not being as athletic as the exponents of power tennis, Hingis remained at the very top for years thanks to her clever game and sublime touch, but then suddenly wanted to pack it all in at the age of just 22. Nobody really understood why and perhaps not even Hingis herself. However, it was not long before Hingis was back on the tour. Her comeback was going extremely well, she won three tournaments and got back into the top 10 of the world rankings. But she then retired from tennis again, this time not by choice. She was found guilty of taking cocaine after a drug test at Wimbledon and was banned for two years. The media made cruel jibes about how she had gone from being a cheeky young player to being embroiled in a cocaine scandal. Her public image hit a low even though it did not really feel like that to her, as she recalls today: “I was well liked by the people around me.”

Hingis went to ground and only hit the headlines due to relationship problems. She enjoyed little success in her role as a coach on the tennis scene. However, the word from the players she trained with was that she could still compete with the best.

## Another comeback and her third retirement

She wanted to find out if she really could perform at the top level, which proved the best decision of her career. In 2013, Hingis returned to the tour again but this time only as a doubles and mixed doubles specialist. Things were now going well for Hingis, not just on the court but also as far as her image was concerned. She appeared more relaxed than ever before both on and off the tennis court. Whereas before it seemed as though she got no enjoyment from the game but was instead simply unquestioningly putting into practice what her mother demanded, this no longer applied as she was now in her thirties. The one-time prodigy had now turned into a mature woman who was at peace with the world and herself, finally winning widespread acclaim and admitted to the Hall of Fame. On top of all this, she also enjoyed considerable sporting success.

After 23 years and 25 Grand Slam titles, she is now hanging up her racket. But that doesn’t mean she is planning on drawing her pension: “Hey, life goes on,” quips Martina Hingis. She plans to look after her horses, make the occasional appearance at her mother’s tennis centre but above all “take life easier”, as she puts it. What about starting a family? She already has a partner, doctor Harry Leemann. “I would like to have children,” reveals Hingis.

ANDREAS W. SCHMID IS A TENNIS EXPERT AND JOURNALIST AT THE “COOPZEITUNG”

# “Like working on a sculpture”

Bernhard Russi is not just probably the most prominent Swiss ski racer of all time, he is also a leading piste designer. He is now designing the Olympic downhill slope in South Korea.

BENJAMIN STEFFEN

**Swiss Review: Bernhard Russi, you're designing the slope for the downhill races at the Pyeongchang Olympic Games, which will be held in Jeongseon. Is it true that this process began more than a decade and a half ago in 2001?**

Bernhard Russi: Strictly speaking, it actually started even further back than that. I spent a lot of time in South Korea during the 1990s because the South Koreans wanted a piste of World Cup standard for the slalom and giant slalom. A member of the Korean Olympic Committee later told me that they wanted to host the Winter Olympic Games one day. I told him that they would need a mountain for a downhill slope. It seemed inconceivable that there was a mountain in South Korea that would be suitable for an Olympic downhill course and could meet the minimum height difference requirement of 800 metres. Most mountains in South Korea are pyramid-shaped with four ridges culminating in a peak. The only option was to come down a ridge, which would not provide a great downhill piste.



**So, what was the solution?**

Around the year 2000, it was pointed out to me that there was a mountain in Jeongseon with slightly different characteristics that provided the height difference required. I studied the maps and travelled to the site, and the first inspection was then carried out on 20 August 2001. We walked along some trails probably made by animals or foresters.

**How large was the inspection group?**

There were perhaps 10 or 12 of us. One member of the group was an expert on the mountain, another on local weather conditions and a third on the geology. In such cases, it's always important that conservationists are also present who can identify any trees worthy of protection, for example, at an early stage.

**What is the first step in creating a piste?**

There are two key things. Firstly, are maps available? You can determine the terrain quite well from a map with a scale of 1:10,000. Then you quite simply have to inspect the terrain with your own eyes. I go down possible routes and mark individual trees with coloured ribbons. Somebody then follows these routes with a GPS from which a plan with five or six lines is created.

**What is this work like?**

I'd say that it's like working on a sculpture. You know what a piste should look like, but you constantly have to modify and reshape it. When you think you've got the right route, you walk down it again to gain the best possible insight into the character of the mountain. You can't impose things on the mountain – that doesn't work.

**Have you ever arrived in a place and had to say “I'm sorry, but it's not going to work on this mountain”?**

I remember one occasion in Quebec. The terrain had potential for a short downhill slope but it didn't have the 800-metre height difference required. The Canadians suggested making up the lack of height at the top. They wanted to excavate a lake and put the excavated material on the summit. Just imagine it – a pretty even slope with an artificial 100-metre peak! I was not the only one opposed to the idea as the International Ski Federation also discussed the proposal and concluded that it could not start artificially altering mountains to this extent.

**Is there another mountain anywhere in the world where you would really like to create a new downhill slope?**

Not really. I actually think we now have enough good ski resorts. On the other hand, I believe it is right that China should be allowed to build a new large-scale ski resort with a downhill slope of World Cup standard with a view to the 2022 Winter Olympic Games. China has never had anything like that. It was similar in Russia before the Sochi Olympic Games. I remember a leading politician from Sochi being asked by a Swiss journalist whether he had a guilty conscience over building a ski resort. The politician answered: “You're Swiss, aren't you? How many ski resorts have you got?” The journalist replied: “Maybe 50, 60, 70.” The Russian said: “So, why shouldn't we have one too?”

**What does that tell us?**

These are matters of opinion. Some people believe the development of ski resorts, skiing and indeed modern tourism are all ludicrous. My personal view is that nature is there for people to enjoy it to some extent and tourism in mountain regions enables people to make a living. If you hold such views, you also have to be willing to permit some encroachments.

BENJAMIN STEFFEN IS THE SPORTS EDITOR FOR THE “NEUE ZÜRCHER ZEITUNG”

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# OSA advice

*I've heard that the Swiss Abroad can vote electronically in some cantons. Which ones are they?*

The following cantons allow their citizens abroad to vote over the Internet: Aargau, Basel-Stadt, Berne, Fribourg, Geneva, Lucerne, Neuchâtel and St. Gallen. Other cantons, such as Vaud and Thurgau, plan to introduce e-voting for their citizens abroad in the course of 2018.

The introduction of electronic voting falls under the remit of the cantons which have sole discretion as to whether or not to provide their citizens with this additional means of voting. This is why not all cantons currently provide the Swiss Abroad with this opportunity.

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad is campaigning for the introduction of e-voting for all Swiss Abroad, regardless of which canton they vote in.

For further information, see the factsheet on electronic voting published by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad: <http://aso.ch/fr/politique/themes-politiques>

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

## OSA Youth Service:

Discover Switzerland with other young Swiss Abroad and make new contacts

The winter camps have already come and gone. A total of 50 young Swiss Abroad enjoyed the magnificent winter weather in the Swiss mountains again this year where they headed straight for the slopes. Preparations for the summer camps are now getting under way. The teams of leaders are fully focused on planning the camp activities to ensure participants have a wonderful time once again.

The Youth Service is organising the following camps and activities this summer:

### Camps for young people

- Camp with sport and recreational activities in Saas-Grund (Valais): 14/07 to 27/07/2018
- Camp with sport and recreational activities in Wyssachen (Berne): 28/07 to 10/08/2018
- Outdoor camp (starting in Valais): 28/07 to 10/08/2018
- Camp with sport and recreational activities in Fiesch (Valais): 11/08 to 24/08/2018
- Swiss Challenge, the whole of Switzerland: 14/07 to 27/07/2018

### Politics camp and the Congress of the Swiss Abroad

Our politics camp is ideal for anyone wanting to find out all about Swiss politics. Before the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Visp, the Youth Service will be running a highly diverse two-week programme. Swiss politics will be explained simply, objectively and clearly. The camp will also include workshops and meetings with Swiss politicians on the topic of "Switzerland without Europe – Europe without Switzerland". In addition to the workshops and political topics, participants will also have the chance to explore the magnificent mountain landscape of the canton of Valais and to visit the city of Berne. All of this is topped off by participation in the Congress of the Swiss Abroad.



### Language courses

The camps provide an excellent chance for participants to discover their roots and Switzerland. Our language courses present another fantastic opportunity. On our German and French courses, participants study one of the four national languages to enable them to communicate or they develop already acquired skills. The Youth Service is running the following courses:

- German course in Zurich: 09/07 to 20/07/2018
- French course in Fribourg: 09/07 to 20/07/2018
- German course in Basel: 23/07 to 03/08/2018
- German course in Brig: 06/08 to 17/08/2018

Information and registration:

[www.aso.ch](http://www.aso.ch) or [www.swisscommunity.org](http://www.swisscommunity.org).

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# educationsuisse – the Swiss education system

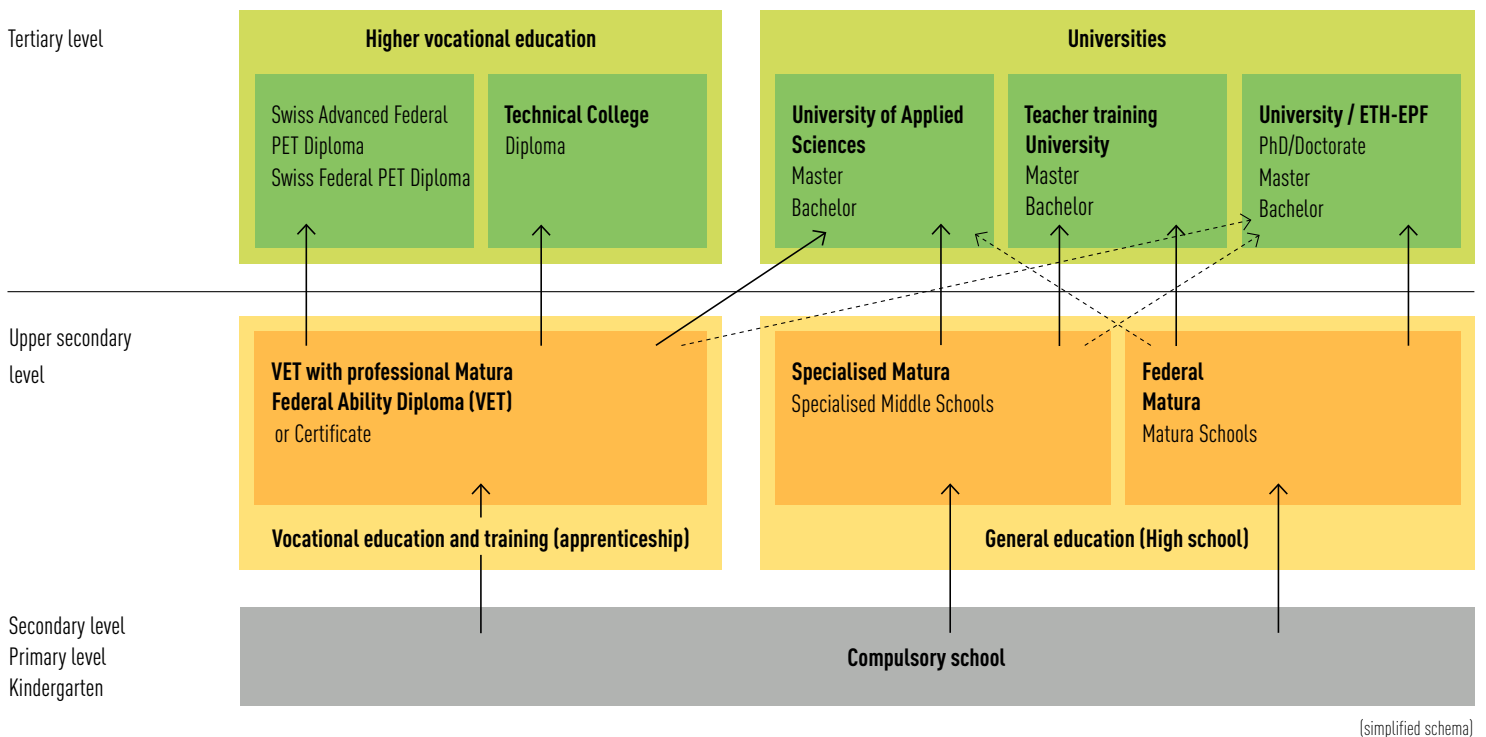
Switzerland offers an extremely wide range of educational courses and training opportunities. Dual-track vocational training combining practice and theory is a special feature of the system. This basic vocational training can take place in a host company – whether a private company or a public body – combined with one or two days of school a week. There is also sometimes the opportunity to attend classes on a full-time basis (apprentice workshops or commercial schools). Lessons are also combined with hands-on training at tertiary level in higher vocational education. Two thirds of all young people undertake basic vocational training (apprenticeships) after compulsory education. Many of them also obtain their vocational school-leaving qualifications alongside their apprenticeship enabling them to study at universities of applied sciences later on.

Switzerland's universities provide a wide range of outstanding courses. There are ten traditional universities which are public insti-

tutions (Geneva, Lausanne, Fribourg, Neuchâtel, Berne, Basel, Lucerne, Zurich, St. Gallen and Svizzera Italiana) and two federal institutes of technology in Zurich and Lausanne. Many public universities of applied sciences also provide vocational courses at university level. The teacher training colleges train young people as qualified teachers to work at the various levels of the school system.

Please contact our staff via email, by telephone or make an appointment to visit in person (see contact details below or at [www.educationsuisse.ch](http://www.educationsuisse.ch)) if you have any questions about the Swiss education system or any general questions regarding education in Switzerland for young Swiss people abroad or concerning educationsuisse's advisory services. Our employees speak German, French, English, Italian and Spanish.

## Swiss Educational System



The Swiss education system is renowned for its high degree of freedom to choose educational paths. There are various ways of gaining a place on, switching or catching up on training or educational courses. Anyone holding the qualifications required can generally embark on the course of their choice.

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## FYSA – summer camps for children aged 8 to 14

From the end of June to the end of August 2018, Swiss children abroad can enjoy a fantastic experience while also discovering Switzerland and its culture together with 30 to 50 other children from all over the world at two-week FYSA summer camps.



At the camps run by the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad, participants will visit attractions, discover lakes, mountains, rivers and landscapes on short hikes, and explore cities. Some days will also be spent at the camp base where participants will enjoy games, sporting activities and various workshops. They will also, of course, have the opportunity to gain fascinating insights into Switzerland. We will look at Swiss songs, Swiss recipes and typically Swiss games and sports, for example.

The interaction with participants from other countries and the exchange across linguistic, cultural and national boundaries present a unique opportunity to make new friends and enjoy some unforgettable moments.

There are still places available at our holiday camps. The full details and the registration form can be found at [www.sjas.ch/en/camps](http://www.sjas.ch/en/camps). We would also be pleased to send you our information brochure with an overview of the offers available by post on request.

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 on the registration form. We would be pleased to provide you with further information.

### THE SWISS ABROAD ON INSTAGRAM



## “The Swiss stick together in Japan”

*The 27-year-old Luca Orduña went for broke. He set off for Japan for the first time in his life at the age of 22 and launched his own business.*

“Working in Japan means I challenge myself every day and am forced out of my comfort zone. I’ve always been fascinated by Asian culture and languages. I visited Japan for the first time at the age of 22 thanks to a grant from the Swiss-Japanese chamber of commerce. After spending this year in Japan, the big question was: What next? With a friend I came up with the idea of setting up a distribution company specialising in the Asian market for Swiss watch brands.

I speak only Japanese at work and with my customers. Even after five years in Japan, there are still times when I don’t understand the finer points of the language. I also sometimes find it difficult to think outside the box and to try not just to make improvements but to present new and innovative solutions as well. I live in Tokyo right by the famous Shibuya Crossing. Despite all the people, I never find the city hectic as everyone is so respectful here. I also enjoy taking part in the activities organised by the Swiss in Japan and see a great sense of togetherness here. Another thing I really appreciate about Japan is the fact that it has so much to offer in terms of natural beauty. Thanks to the four distinctive seasons, there are snow-covered mountains and skiing in winter and warm lakes and the ocean in summer for water sports and swimming. However, what impresses me most about Japan is its cuisine. The countless restaurants serve the best Japanese food as well as dishes from all over the world. I really like the fact that people share food in Japan, which makes dining a more sociable occasion.”

This interview was published on [swissinfo.ch](http://swissinfo.ch), the online service of the Swiss Broadcasting Company which is available in ten languages. Do you also live abroad? Then add the tag [#WeAreSwissAbroad](https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/weareswissabroad/) to your photos on Instagram.

# Switzerland's digital transformation

The aim of e-government is to provide the public, economy and administration with easy-to-use, location-independent and fast services. The use of state-of-the-art information and communication technology (ICT) enables services to be delivered securely, transparently and efficiently. This also benefits the Swiss Abroad.

Huge progress has been made in the field of ICT over recent decades, which has also had an impact on the work of government and political institutions. They are making increasing use of the internet to make access to information for the public easier than before and to deliver services digitally.

These digital services include e-voting, for example. 21<sup>st</sup>-century technology is being deployed to maintain Switzerland's culture and tradition of exercising political rights. Groups with special requirements, such as the Swiss Abroad, benefit from this in particular. On 5 April 2017, the Federal Council agreed steps towards the nation-



wide introduction of electronic voting. It intends to submit an amendment to the legal basis to Parliament, thus establishing e-voting as a third official method of voting alongside postal voting and voting at the ballot box. Around 77,000 Swiss Abroad were able to cast their votes electroni-

cally on 24 September 2017 in the cantons of Berne, Lucerne, Fribourg, Basel-Stadt, St. Gallen, Aargau, Neuchâtel and Geneva. The cantons of Fribourg, Basel-Stadt, St. Gallen, Neuchâtel and Geneva also enabled around 103,000 eligible voters in Switzerland to use the e-voting system.

Another objective is E-ID – the introduction of the first official form of electronic identification. Parliament will discuss a draft bill over the course of the year. The *Federal Act on Electronic Identification Services (E-ID Act)* provides for a division of responsibilities between the state and market players. Federal government will perform the role of a regulatory and certification authority ensuring an optimal legal and organisational framework. E-ID will allow users to conveniently register with various electronic service providers at any time enabling them to obtain, for example, an extract from the judicial record or access to the online counter for the Swiss Abroad easily and securely. This will eliminate the need for expen-

sive paper ID documents and the management of usernames and passwords for individual websites. E-ID will be a basic service on the basis of which other digital services can be developed and will therefore act as a catalyst on the road to comprehensive digital e-government.

Federal government, the cantons and the communes have drawn up a joint strategy for the implementation of e-government. It is made up of 12 strategic projects and services. The E-Government Switzerland Steering Committee will define the projects and services for four years, review them annually and amend them if required. A framework agreement on e-government cooperation will govern the joint approach of the three levels of government in implementing the strategy. Federal government and the cantons will each meet half the costs of the initiative.

## Important notice

Notify your local Swiss embassy or consulate about your email address(es) and mobile phone number(s) and/or changes to these and register at the online counter (link on the FDFA homepage [www.eda.admin.ch](http://www.eda.admin.ch)) or via [www.swissabroad.ch](http://www.swissabroad.ch) to select your preferred format for receiving "Swiss Review" and other publications. Please contact your Swiss representation if you have trouble registering.

Both 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 delivered free of charge either as a print edition or electronically (by email) to the homes of all Swiss Abroad and/or made available via an iOS/Android app.

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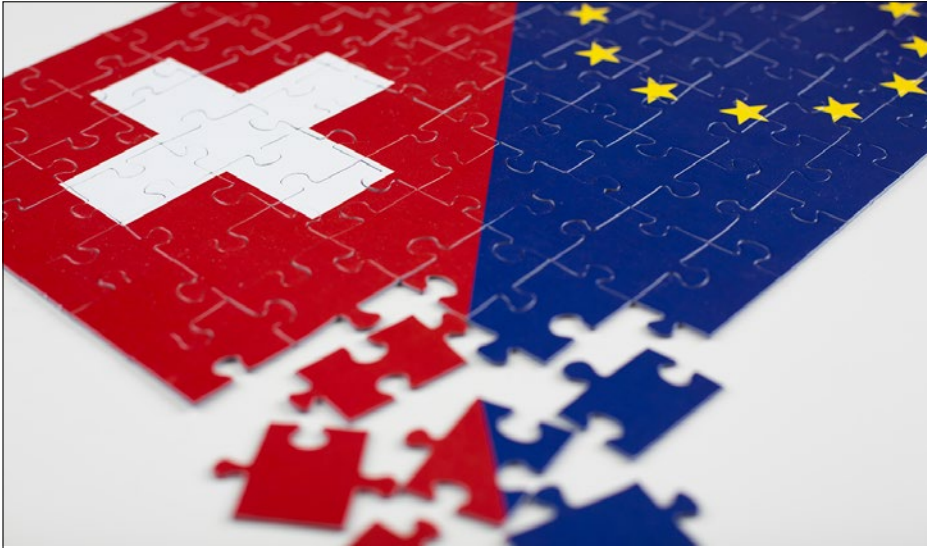
## itineris

Online registration for Swiss citizens travelling abroad  
[www.fdfa.admin.ch/itineris](http://www.fdfa.admin.ch/itineris)



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## “Bilateral Agreements between Switzerland and the EU”, 2017 edition

This publication, available in German, French and Italian, provides a current overview of Swiss policy on Europe and explores the key bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the EU. It can be ordered and downloaded free of charge: [www.eda.admin.ch/europa/publikationen](http://www.eda.admin.ch/europa/publikationen)

## Federal referendums

Voting proposals are determined by the Federal Council at least four months before the voting date. The following proposals will be put to the vote on 4 March 2018:

- Federal decree of 16 June 2017 on the new 2021 financial regime
- Popular initiative of 11 December 2015 “Yes to abolishing radio and television fees (abolition of Billag fees)”

**Other voting dates in 2018:**

**10 June, 23 September, 25 November**

All information on the proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by 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 federal popular initiatives had been launched at the time of going to press (deadline for the collection of signatures in brackets):

- “Encourage organ donation - save lives” (17 April 2019)

The list of pending popular initiatives can be found in German at [www.bk.admin.ch](http://www.bk.admin.ch) > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen > Im Sammelstadium.



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## Treasures from the past

Old coins do not just turn up at auctions or exchanges. Countless valuable coins also lie buried in the ground right beneath our feet. Some of these are on display at the Museum of Money in Lausanne. This is home to around 1,400 valuable coins and medals from the region dating from antiquity to the present day.

Musée Monétaire: Palais de Rumine (3<sup>e</sup> niveau), Place de la Riponne 6, Lausanne. [www.musee-monetaire.ch](http://www.musee-monetaire.ch)



A moveable iron die for the falling-hammer or screw-press striking of the quarter ecu coin. Kingdom of France, Henry IV (1589 to 1610), unknown mint.



An obverse and reverse die for the screw-press striking of the 20 Batzen coin. Canton of Vaud, Lausanne, 1810.



A fixed die for hammer striking anonymous coins minted by the Bishopric of Lausanne. The stamp is illegible. 14<sup>th</sup> century.



A general of steel: The obverse die for the screw-press striking of the Swiss General Dufour medal by the medal-maker Antoine Bovy, Geneva, 1846.



1 Kreuzer coin made of iron: A moveable die for the hammer striking of coins. Bishopric of Sion, Hildebrand I of Riedmatten (1565 to 1604), Sion.



An ancient bronze find: Die for hammer striking the Denarius coin minted by Naevius Balbus, 79 BC.



A die for the screw-press striking of the one franc coin showing a coat of arms. Canton of Vaud, Lausanne, 1846.



This moveable iron die for hammer striking the coins minted by Louis II, Baron of Vaud, in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was found in Rovray.

## The Kummer family and their woes



MARIE-JEANNE URECH:  
"Les Valets de nuit",  
Edition l'Aire, Vevey, 2010.  
German translation  
by Lis Künzli:  
"Schnitz", Bilgerverlag,  
2017. 288 pages,  
around CHF 26.

"The silhouette of the commission agent drew near to the icy window, suddenly his face appeared fragmented in the candlelight of a birthday cake." This opening sentence suggests that the agent is not bringing good news. The Kummer family, like many others, are in arrears with their mortgage payments. But today they are celebrating Zobelina's fifth birthday. Even her father Nathanael, who holds down five different jobs, and her mother Rose, who works tirelessly selling vitamin supplements door to door, are at home. The other family members are Zobelina's brother Yapaklu, Seraphin, who has been traumatised by war, and Philanthropie, the chubby singer. She has always lived in the house and only ever eats "Schnitz", a kind of puff pastry. Every evening she helps the family and their neighbours forget about life's troubles by performing her songs. The two children are left to their own devices and bunk off school. While wandering around deserted streets they stumble across an unusual vending machine selling French fries which conceals a secret.

The story in Marie-Jeanne Urech's book "Schnitz" does not have a specific geographical or temporal setting. It tells of a burst property bubble, the decline of the steel industry and the Kummer family. Winter and the cold predominate from start to finish. When Nathanael clears snow with the ploughshare in the dark streets at night, even the reader shudders with cold. The author paints a gloomy picture, but one which possesses a certain magical quality. This is also created by surreal characters like Philanthropie, who seems to have stepped straight out of a children's fantasy story. Humorous, never downbeat or negative, the author keeps the hope of a happy ending alive. This social drama is fairytale-like but never detached from reality. It is a delightful read.

Marie-Jeanne Urech, born in 1976, attended school and university – where she studied sociology and anthropology – in Lausanne before going to film school in London. She works as a director and freelance writer in Lausanne. This novel was published under the title of "Les Valets de nuit" back in 2010 and won the Prix Rambert. This prize has been awarded to an author from French-speaking Switzerland every three years since 1898. The translation into German by Lis Künzli was published in 2017 with the support of Pro Helvetia. She has done an outstanding job of conveying the author's poetic language in German without using flowery phrases.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

## The bard from Basel-Country



FLORIAN SCHNEIDER  
WITH ADAM TAUBITZ  
"SchangSongs 2".  
Flo Solo Duo Trio, 2017.

Florian Schneider's versatility is remarkable. He is best known for his role in the musical "The Phantom of the Opera" in which he appeared over 500 times in Basel. However, he has also sung at other major musical theatre venues in Europe and performed as a lyrical tenor on the opera stages of the German-speaking world. His repertoire also includes songs from Brecht as well as chansons in dialect, which few people are aware of. Florian Schneider is becoming increasingly passionate about this genre of music.

A few years ago, the Basel-Country-born singer released an album in dialect entitled "SchangSongs". The follow-up is now out and enjoying unexpected success. Florian Schneider's track in dialect "Alts, chalts Hus" went straight to number 1 in the chart for German-speaking artists, while his album "SchangSongs 2" was crowned "album of the month" in the same listing. This chart is not an official hit parade but rather reflects the views of independent experts and music journalists from Germany, Austria, Belgium and Switzerland and is regarded as an important benchmark.

On "SchangSongs 2", Florian Schneider's voice is resonant and at times has a gravelly edge. The similarities to Paolo Conte and Tom Waits are unmistakable in places but in the end his vocals are always softer and smoother. Many of his songs are based on a Tom Waits' melody to which Schneider has added lyrics in dialect. The lyricist sings about his rural home and universal subjects such as love, solitude and death.

His lyrics are sometimes acerbic and morbid but mainly gentle and humorous. In "Alts, chalts Hus", Florian Schneider romanticises about his haunted childhood home, while "Heb di" tells a tender tale of fleeting love. "Bhüet di Gott, du chleises Härz, s bescht vo mir blibt do bi dir ... Und lachs der morn en andre a und lüpfsch der Rock im neggschte Ma, wenn d Wält au morn scho zämmekracht, hüt bisch bi mir die ganzi Nacht." (Take care sweetheart, the best of me lies here with you ... and if tomorrow another man catches your eye and you lift your skirt for him or the sky falls in, today you'll spend all night with me.)

Florian Schneider plays the acoustic guitar on 14 of the album's tracks. He is accompanied by the magnificent German violinist Adam Taubitz who has made his name in classical music and jazz. This instrumentation lends a fragility to the songs in dialect which suits the lyrics wonderfully.

MARKO LEHTINEN

# Jacques Dubochet



One of the signs of an intelligent mind is said to be a sense of humour. Jacques Dubochet from the canton of Vaud, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in October, is without doubt a witty personality, and summed up his achievement by remarking that all he had done was invent cold water. Cold water? That's right, this French-speaking Swiss scientist has created a method to make it possible to flash freeze liquid solutions containing cells. This procedure, which is carried out using liquid ethane, makes it possible for samples to be observed in their natural state.

A member of staff at the University of Geneva joked to the media that the Vaud-born scientist and his colleague Alasdair McDowall had succeeded in doing what people making sorbets at home try to achieve: avoiding creating ice crystals. This is because crystallisation kills the cells in the laboratory.

In an interview with *Le Temps*, Jacques Dubochet revealed that his invention could be used in particular to “study Tau proteins, which are linked with Parkinson’s disease and Alzheimer’s when they accumulate in the brain”. He added that he had a strong personal interest in the field as he is 75 years old!

The researcher’s online CV, which delighted the international media, includes some real gems. It says that he was “the first official dyslexic in the canton of Vaud”, which enabled him “to be poor at everything and to understand those experiencing difficulties”. “One day he offered to take me to the hotel with his suitcase, but when we got to the car park I saw that he only had a bicycle for transportation,” recalled a French researcher with amusement.

As a child, he was scared of the dark and this made him go to the library to try to understand where the sun was hiding. This fear may have stopped him from becoming a criminal, a path which this Vaud-based future Professor Calculus considered.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

## Five new faces in the National Council

Five new National Councillors began work in Berne this winter. Rocco Cattaneo, an FDP politician from Ticino, has taken the place of Ignazio Cassis after his election to the Federal Council. The former cyclist attracted attention right from the off by cycling the 250 kilometres from Ticino to the capital. He was seeking to promote better safety for cyclists and more cycle routes. Irène Kälin of the Green Party has succeeded the retired National Councillor Jonas Fricker. The third new National Councillor is Nik Gugger of the EVP who takes over from Maja Ingold. Diana Gutjahr arrives in place of SVP National Councillor Hansjörg Walter, and the publishing and printing entrepreneur Hansjörg Brunner replaces the retired FDP National Councillor Hermann Hess.

## Nestlé acquires Canadian company

The food group Nestlé has pulled off a billion-dollar takeover deal. The company from French-speaking Switzerland has acquired the Canadian firm Atrium Innovations for 2.3 billion dollars. The company headquartered in Quebec operates in the cosmetics, pharmaceuticals and food sectors and posted revenues of almost 700 million dollars last year. Nestlé indicated that this brings around 1,400 new employees into the group.

## 8.2 % Muslims by 2050?

Researchers at the Pew Research Center in Washington predict that the number of Muslims in Europe is highly likely to rise sharply over the coming decades. Even if further immigration is excluded, the Muslim population today of around 5 % of the total population is estimated to rise to 7.4 % by 2050. The researchers outlined three scenarios for Switzerland. The proportion of Muslims by 2050 will stand at 8.2 % if no more migrants arrive, at 10.3 % in the event of moderate immigration and at 12.9 % in the case of high migration, according to the researchers.

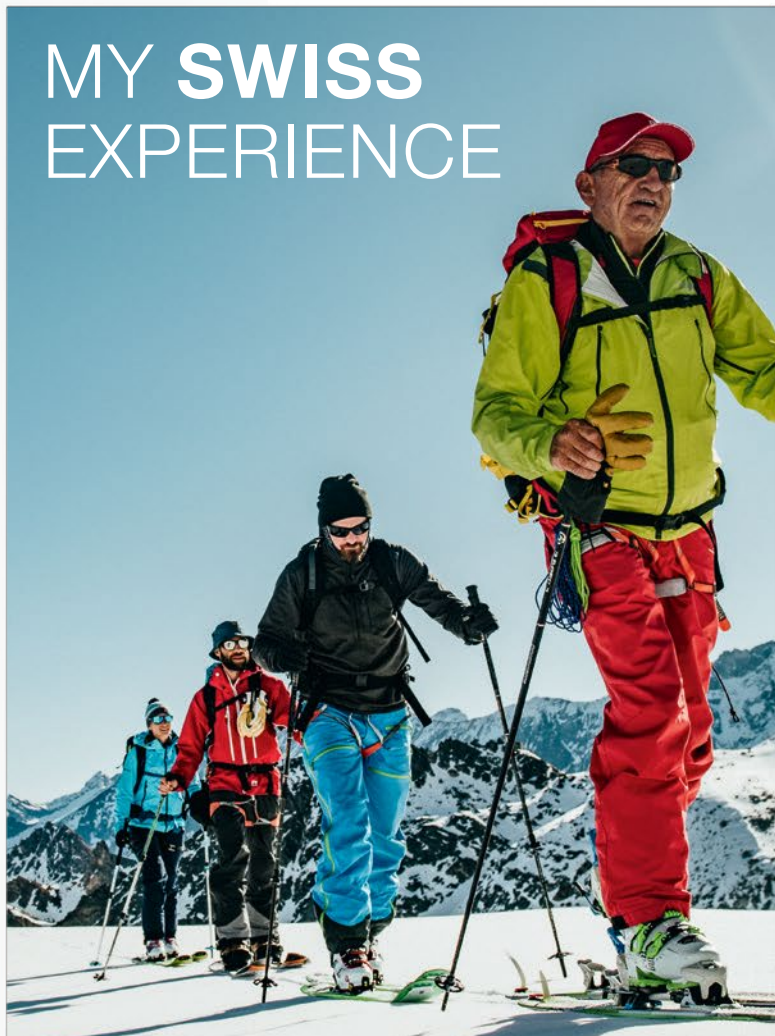
## MPs call for the introduction of e-voting

Ten members of the Swiss Abroad parliamentary group have appealed to the governments and chancelleries of all the Swiss cantons at the initiative of National Councillor Tim Guldemann. They are calling for the Swiss Abroad registered on an electoral roll to be allowed to exercise their political rights at the next federal elections by voting for their National Councillors via the internet. In their letter, the ten signatories wrote: “The Swiss Abroad often receive their voting documents extremely late and sometimes even so late that they are no longer able to cast their vote in time. Only the rapid and nationwide introduction of e-voting can successfully resolve these issues.”



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