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Autor: Aerni, Viviane
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A foundation with a rich tradition is celebrating its anniversary.

Everyone knows the 1 August emblem, which has been sold for decades in the run-up to Swiss National Day. But what was the original vision behind this emblem? It represents the principle of solidarity and patriotism, fostering cultural and social endeavour for the benefit of the Swiss people. By Viviane Aerni

It was the turn of the 20th century when Albert Schuster, a patriotic and charitably minded businessman from St. Gallen, laid the foundations for the Pro Patria foundation. His vision was to establish the celebration of Swiss federalism, which until then had received little recognition, as part of Swiss tradition by introducing patriotic festivities and giving Swiss National Day a deeper meaning of solidarity. The idea was for Swiss people to come together thanks to a common charitable appeal as part of Swiss National Day to help less fortunate members of society. Albert Schuster founded the association Swiss National Day Donation in 1909.

Initially, the association just sold franked postcards specially created for this purpose by popular Swiss artists. The 1 August emblem, which is steeped in tradition, was created in 1923 and has since appeared in a new design every year. The stamps, which have been issued since 1938 in conjunction with the Swiss Post Office, were a major success for Pro Patria at the end of the 1970s. At this time, the carriage surcharges generated more than CHF 4 million a year.

In 1991, the Swiss National Day Donation became a politically independent and non-denomina-

tional public foundation called Pro Patria. The foundation is not subsidised by federal government or the cantons. Fixed administrative costs are intentionally kept low. However, more than 40,000 volunteer workers support Pro Patria by enthusiastically selling its various products on the street or directly. The foundation depends entirely on the solidarity of the Swiss people and its friends abroad for funds.

In the post-war years, money collected was primarily given to needy people among the Swiss population. Owing to the expansion of government and private social institutions, the charity collections have become less of an imperative. This means that only specific social Pro Patria projects still exist today, such as emergency aid for mothers. The proceeds of the collections are now primarily used for the salvation, preservation and maintenance of Swiss cultural heritage, such as

historic buildings and cultural landscapes. The foundation's board, which is made up of representatives from all parts of the country, decides on a priority for the collection each year. This year's collection is for the "Cultural Routes of Switzerland" project. The proceeds are to be used to restore historically significant route sections over the coming years.

However, like many other fundraising organisations, Pro Patria is also being hit by a fall in income. This is not primarily down to the Swiss people being less willing to make donations or waning patriotism. The main reason is the current age of telecommunications where stamps are less important and sales figures are on the decline. Like all other companies, charitable foundations are also at the mercy of changing times. Ideas and concepts have to be refreshed, which Pro Patria is attempting to achieve in its anniversary year, not least through humorous commercials.

Over the course of its 100-year history, Pro Patria has also collected for the Swiss abroad on many occasions. The first time was with the second emblem back in 1924. Other collections were in 1930, 1938, 1946, 1953, 1965, 1972, 1978, 1984, 1990 and 1993.



Focus of the collection in the anniversary year 2010: Cultural Routes of Switzerland. These Pro Patria stamps depict the steps cut into the rock above the Plan de Barasson along the Great St. Bernard Pass and the "proudest side of the city of Basel".

