

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 46 (2019)
Heft: 1

Vorwort: A brief storm, but thunder rumbles on
Autor: Lettau, Marc

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 22.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

A brief storm, but thunder rumbles on

5 Mailbag

6 Focus

The Swiss political landscape ahead of the elections

10 Sport

Julien Wanders races to the top

12 Science

Ski resorts plan to use yesterday's snow to defy climate change

14 Report

Swiss technology extracts CO₂ from the atmosphere

16 Literature series

Why does Gottfried Keller's "Green Henry" end so tragically?

News from around the world

17 Society

The people of Valais and their alternative to the franc

19 Politics

A first in Federal Council elections

23 OSA news

ASO advocates e-voting

26 news.admin.ch

28 Images

The meal plan of the future

30 Books / Sounds

31 Top pick / News



Peaceful, neutral and committed to its humanitarian tradition – that's how many people see Switzerland. Many also see the country as well able to defend itself – as evidenced by its own army, and the domestic defence industry. Weapons produced by Swiss manufacturers are also used by foreign armies and police forces, however: Switzerland is an arms exporter. It is thus forever attempting to balance moral

principle with business sense. That is why exports to belligerent nations are essentially taboo.

In the summer of 2018, the Federal Council challenged this taboo. It announced that, depending on the circumstances, it would also allow arms exports to countries engaged in civil war. The logic was that only an arms industry that could produce – and export – in sufficient volumes could keep pace with technology.

It was a bad idea, which met with a loud outcry and led to substantial political fallout. In just two days, incensed citizens had gathered more than 100,000 signatures for a popular initiative to stop arms exports to countries engaged in civil war. The lightning response was coordinated by a broad alliance consisting primarily of civil society organisations. Switzerland had never seen a new grouping play so quickly to its political strengths. It clearly demonstrated the current acceleration in the pace of direct democracy.

The Federal Council has since shelved its plans, but that doesn't mean they are off the agenda entirely. Hardly a week goes by without new reports of Swiss exports to belligerent nations: weapons to Saudi Arabia, party to the civil war in Yemen; munitions to Russia, flying sorties in Syria; and bombs and missiles to Turkey – the list goes on. Even without the planned further easing of regulations, exports to warring nations are rising at an alarming rate. In 2014, they accounted for 7.4 per cent of all armaments exports. By 2017, they were as high as 31.2 per cent, according to the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" newspaper's meticulous calculations.

The autumn storm has blown in an issue that Switzerland will find almost impossible to avoid in the current election year. It also demonstrated that, in Switzerland as elsewhere, new and agile civil society players are challenging the political status quo. That is perhaps good in this particular case, but what happens if, in the future, much less coordinated pressure groups attempt to push through their extreme goals by following the same pattern? It is a worrying prospect. Then again, perhaps our future Parliament will act shrewdly enough that interventions like that of the 'Alliance against Arms Exports' will no longer be necessary. The Vote Preview in this edition of the "Swiss Review" offers an initial introduction to the topic.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Cover image: Genevan sportsman Julien Wanders runs towards the horizon in the Kenyan morning light. Photo: Guillaume Megevand