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# Reflecting together on the challenges facing democracy

How does Switzerland's democratic system confront the big challenges of today? This question, the core theme of the upcoming Congress of the Swiss Abroad, has probably never been more relevant than now. Those attending the event in Lugano on 19 and 20 August 2022 will have no shortage of issues to discuss.



Sunset over the lake – Lugano is an attractive venue. Photo: Milo Zanecchia

This year's Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lugano has already provided unwitting testimony to the fast-moving world in which we live. Its stated theme – "What are the challenges facing our democracy?" – is already three years old. Little did we know back then that both the 2020 and 2021 congress would fall foul of the pandemic. Now that Swiss Abroad from around the world as well as members of the Council of the Swiss Abroad are actually able to meet in Lugano, the congress theme appears in a completely different light.

With Russia having invaded Ukraine, the fundamental challenges facing democracy take on a whole new dimension. This comes after Covid-19, which has already put an unprecedented strain on democracy.

## Original topics relevant as ever

Meanwhile, topics on the original congress agenda – globalisation, immigration, data protection, connectivity, increased difficulty in exercising political rights – have lost none

of their resonance in terms of their impact on democracy. In immediate, practical terms for many Swiss Abroad, there is the issue of not being able to vote at all – and the reforms needed to rectify this situation. If anything, the sense of urgency has increased, given that elections to the National Council and the Council of States are scheduled for 2023.

## New issues have arisen

"How do we protect Switzerland's unique democratic principles amid the rise of autocracy?" asked the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) back in 2019 in preparation for the congress. For the politicians, experts and delegates gathering in Lugano, this issue is more pressing than ever. And to the list of questions regarding the future from a Swiss perspective have recently been added new conundrums. Are Switzerland's democratic system and neutral status enough of a safeguard against outside threats? How safe is Switzerland at present

and in future for Swiss at home and abroad? Amid the brutal war in Ukraine, what role, if any, should Switzerland play? And finally: given everything happening in the world right now, what are the implications for Swiss neutrality?

These questions need answers. The onus is on dialogue, shared interest and engagement to obtain them. The 98th Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lugano aims to ignite the conversation, as figures from politics, business and science come together to consider some of the most pressing issues concerning Swiss democracy. Representatives of the major Swiss political parties are expected to outline their thoughts and suggest solutions. President of the Swiss Confederation Ignazio Cassis will also address the assembled Swiss Abroad in Lugano, offering his own view of the future.

## Follow on live stream

The Council of the Swiss Abroad, referred to as the "Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland", will convene on Friday, 19 August. The plenary session and workshops will take place on Saturday, 20 August. OSA President Filippo Lombardi will open and close the congress. Anyone who cannot be in Lugano can follow the 2022 Congress of the Swiss Abroad on live stream instead at [www.swiss-community.org](http://www.swiss-community.org).

(AB/MUL)

[revue.link/lugano2022](http://revue.link/lugano2022)  
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## “I want to give something back”

Fashion designer Lucrezia Biondi, who lives in Germany, used to go on OSA Youth Service summer camps every year when she was younger. She is now taking the plunge as a camp leader and wishes to take elements of her training for this position and put them into practice in her professional life.

### MIREILLE GUGGENBÜHLER

Lucrezia Biondi works as a clothes designer and has her own fashion line. She is a dance instructor, she is learning to become a yoga teacher – and she has also completed her training as a Y+S camp leader this year. Y+S stands for Youth and Sport, the federal government scheme to promote sport. Soon Biondi will be doing a dance project in the south of France. A few weeks later, she will be co-leading the OSA Youth Service camp in Fieschertal (canton of Valais). The 26-year-old obviously has a lot on her plate and a great deal of energy to burn. “I just get a kick out of doing a lot of different things,” she laughs.

Living in Germany, Biondi is a Swiss Abroad herself. Her mother grew up in Ge-

neva, while her father holds dual Swiss and German citizenship. She used to go on an OSA camp every year as a child and teenager. “It was the highlight of the year for me,” she says. “To meet people of my age from around the world, all of them Swiss nationals like me, was always exciting.”

### The attraction of team play

It is ten years since Biondi last went on such a camp. “Because I enjoyed the camps so much, I decided to become a camp leader myself. I want to experience that special atmosphere again and give something back.”

Biondi did the Y+S camp sports and trekking instructor course in Switzerland. “The course itself is structured like a camp. I

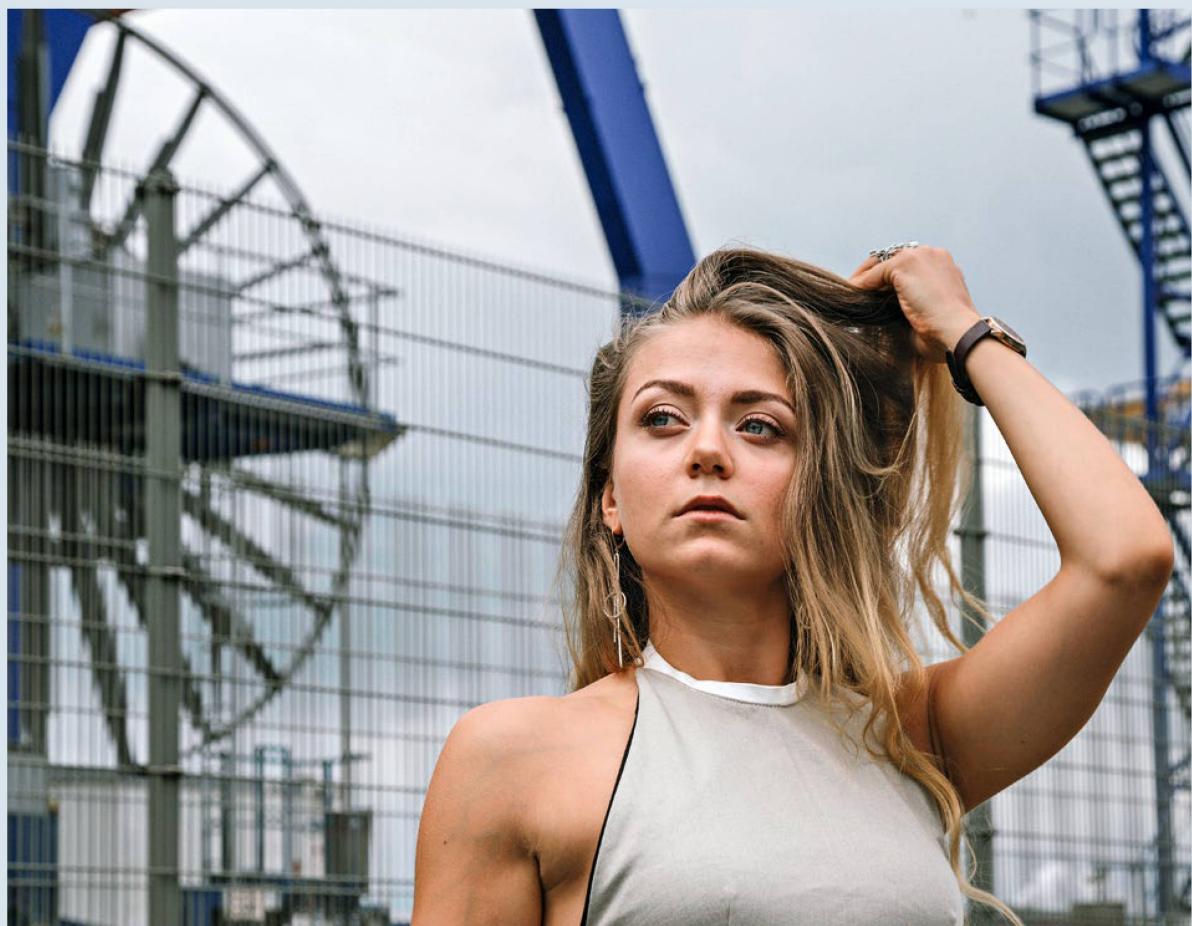
thought that was great. The whole camping environment pulled me in again straight away.” Biondi felt particularly energised by the team-play nature of camp sports. “Until then, I had only ever done sports outside the competitive, teamwork setting. This playful aspect of camp sports is missing in fashion, yoga and dance.” The course changed her perspective. “I found that camp sports can really be quite exciting too. I can imagine incorporating these elements in my professional work.”

### Chance to catch up with her relatives

There was another good thing about doing the Y+S training course in Switzerland: “I realised it had been a long time since I had last

Lucrezia Biondi in her day job as a fashion designer.

Photo: provided



# In Switzerland for education or training

Young Swiss Abroad receive specific information on the topic of education in Switzerland.

seen my Swiss relatives." She therefore went to visit them after completing her course. But Biondi not only caught up with her extended Swiss family, but also travelled to the base in Fieschertal where the camp is due to take place. She and the team spent a weekend there preparing for the camp. Anticipa-

**"Because I enjoyed the camps so much, I decided to become a camp leader myself."**

tion was starting to build, she reports. Nevertheless, Biondi is happy not to have to take on overall responsibility for the camp yet. She is non-committal on whether she wants to be head of camp one day. "I will just do my job and gain experience."

Biondi still has a fair amount to do before the camp begins. She is currently putting the finishing touches to her part of the schedule and is looking forward to good vibes and a good group of young people. And she cannot wait to return to Switzerland. "I call it home, without ever having lived there."

Every year, the staff of educationsuisse receive numerous inquiries from Swiss citizens abroad or from their relatives and friends in Switzerland. Most questions concern scholarship opportunities and university studies. However, educationsuisse also receives a wide variety of questions about vocational training, finding an apprenticeship, accommodation, insurance, and the language skills required. It often becomes apparent that due to the rather high cost of living in Switzerland, financing an education can be a problem, but in fact a solution can always be found.

The educationsuisse service offers free advice and support in the search for suitable education or training solutions:

- Information relating to different educational options such as university studies or vocational training
- Information relating to specific questions regarding admission requirements, required language skills, deadlines, accommodation, insurances, etc.

- Individual counselling onsite in Berne or online on the topic of education in Switzerland
- Vocational and study counselling in cooperation with a professional career counselling provider (fee-based)
- Assistance in applying for cantonal scholarship and administrative support
- Financial help (grants/loans) from educationsuisse and private foundations

The educationsuisse staff speak English, German, French, Italian and Spanish. They will be glad to help and answer questions about education in Switzerland via email, telephone, Skype or onsite in Berne.



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Information on education and training in Switzerland is available in numerous languages. Photo: Anja Lütscher



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# I want to change my old Swiss driving licence. What do I do?

**Question:** I have been living abroad for many years outside the EU/EFTA area and have now learned that Switzerland's old blue paper driving licence will no longer be valid after 31 January 2024. It must be changed into a driving licence in credit card format, apparently. Neither the Swiss consulate nor my road traffic office in Switzerland were able to assist me. Surely there should be a way for Swiss Abroad to avoid losing their old Swiss driving licence. What can I do?



**Answer:** That's right, the old blue paper driving licence will no longer be valid from February 2024. As it stands, you can no longer swap your old driving licence either. The reason is as follows:

From the date on which you begin residing abroad, the Swiss authorities can no longer issue you with a new driving licence in credit card format, nor can they provide you with an international driving licence. When you are domiciled abroad, it is the authorities of your country of residence that have authority with regard to your driving licence rather than Switzerland. This is based on the principle of territoriality, whereby you are subject to the legal system of the country in which you reside. This also applies to the area of road traffic, which is also governed by the law of your country of residence.

The cantonal road traffic authority that issued your driving licence can only provide

you with an attestation stating that you are the holder of a Swiss driving licence. This attestation certifies that you have obtained a driving licence based on the conditions stipulated by Swiss law. You will then have to inquire with the authorities responsible in your country of residence as to which conditions have to be met for a driving licence to be issued to you (confirmation of the information contained in the attestation, driving test, etc.).

Should you take up residence in Switzerland again later, you must get in touch with your cantonal road traffic authority in order to obtain a driving licence in credit card format. For the contact details of the cantonal road traffic authorities, visit: [www.strassenverkehrsamt.ch](http://www.strassenverkehrsamt.ch)

Ursula Schindler, OSA Legal Service,  
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## Fresh new look, but concerns remain

The previous issue of "Swiss Review" came with a revamped layout. This demonstrates our commitment to the hard copy edition. For our publisher, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, it is an acknowledgement of the continued backing that the printed magazine enjoys from our readers. The print edition is popular among many Swiss Abroad, as it provides a tangible, tactile connection to Switzerland. Some 325,000 readers currently subscribe to it.

However, we are experiencing choppy waters at the moment. Paper shortages in Europe drove up our printing costs in 2021. With the war in Ukraine turning the market for raw materials on its head, the price of paper has skyrocketed further this year.

In view of this, please note again that you can pay a voluntary subscription to help fund the print edition of "Swiss Review". Your kind support will allow us to continue publishing on paper for the foreseeable future. For a voluntary subscription, please make your payment to the following account (note that cheques cannot be cashed):

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# Discussion

Each edition of “Swiss Review” touches on aspects of everyday life in Switzerland. And each edition turns into a veritable guessing game for the editorial team as we ask ourselves which article will elicit the liveliest reaction from readers. In our 3/2022 magazine, it was a report about Swiss forests. Reading the article, many people realised for the first time that Switzerland has had a ban on deforestation since 1876, and that since then, the surface area of Swiss forests has not decreased at all in size. Radical nature conservation practices – begun almost 150 years ago.



## My best friend, the forest

### RICHARD JAKOB-HOFF, NEW ZEALAND

Thank you for sharing this article. My love and spiritual connection with forests began in my early childhood in Switzerland. In the forests in and around my birthplace, Wengen, and later Visp. I find them a place of solace wherever I am in the world and am alarmed and dismayed at the disrespect shown by my species to these guardians of global health and human welfare. I was not aware that Switzerland had banned deforestation well over a century ago. This is something that should be more widely known as an example to others.

### LOTTI MOHAR, AURORA, CANADA

Reading the report on forests really warmed my heart. Lovely memories come flooding back from 30 years ago. How many times did I accompany my father to the Dählhölzli forest, all the way down to the River Aare, where we also dropped by to see the zoo animals? I will never forget those special moments from my childhood.

### MARIA CHAND, PARKSVILLE, CANADA

A law dating back to 1876 that is still protecting forests today. What a gift for the planet and all the species on it.

### ELENA LACROIX JAEGGY, FRANCE/SWITZERLAND

Mountain bikes on forest paths and motorbikes everywhere have become a scourge all over Switzerland. An enormous amount of information and awareness-raising work is required, including bans when necessary, to bring an end to this problem. They pose an ongoing danger for all animals and biodiversity in general, not to mention causing an ecological catastrophe and constant noise. It is absolutely imperative that we stop this devastating trend, which offers no actual benefits at all.

### **Ban on Nazi symbols in Switzerland**

### RALF WEYENETH, LOWER SAXONY, GERMANY

It is incomprehensible to me that there are still incorrigible people around today who have learned nothing from the past. The symbols and salutes used during the Nazi era should really be punishable by law. We only need to look at the USA to see where such practices can lead, but unfortunately they are on the way to becoming the norm in Europe as well these days.

### SERGIO PAINI, AUSTRALIA

How much longer do we have to "educate" people about what was done to the Jewish population during the Second World War? There is no place anywhere for anti-Semitism.

## A warm welcome for Ukrainian refugees

### ARYE-ISAAC OPHIR, ISRAEL

There are good reasons to welcome the Ukrainian refugees. On the one hand, because our own humanity demands it of us, and on the other because it also offers us an opportunity to introduce them to the norms of western civilisation, in the hope of positively influencing the future development of Ukraine.

## A new look for “Swiss Review”

### KATRIN BONNOFSKY, SEATTLE, USA

Your redesigned magazine is terrific. Much better organised. Everything clear and coherent. Thank you. I wish you continued success.

You can view our online edition of “Swiss Review” – [www.revue.ch](http://www.revue.ch) – at any time and comment on articles or read the latest comments.

Moreover, you can participate in the ongoing discussions on the Community platform of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) or start your own dialogues.

At the moment, the platform has three discussions on the go relating to the topic of “the challenges facing democracy”, which is also this year’s theme at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lugano. One discussion focuses on the question “How can we tackle ‘fake news’?” Below is one of the related comments:

### HANS ULRICH LUTZ, SOUTH KOREA

We are proud to be citizens of a country with direct democracy; one that considers us mature enough to decide on important matters. However, when our citizens are not/no longer capable of such decisions because they appear to be easily manipulated, would the next logical step perhaps be to limit their democratic rights and obligations? I tend to believe that we must invest a great deal more in equipping our children to think and act independently. I am confident that my fellow citizens are still able to form their own opinions.

Direct link to the discussion: [revue.link/fake](http://revue.link/fake)

Link to the SwissCommunity discussion forum: [members.swisscommunity.org/forum](http://members.swisscommunity.org/forum)

