

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 6 (1940-1941)
Heft: 4

Artikel: Switzerland as hub of Europe stands guards at crossroads
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943016>

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: 16.01.2026

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

SWITZERLAND AS HUB OF EUROPE STANDS GUARD AT CROSSROADS.

Switzerland is the hub of Europe, linking the North and South, and the West and East of the continent.

The white cross upon her national flag symbolically represents the ridge of the Alps. One of the arms of this cross connects the upper Rhone valley with that of the Rhine; the other, across the St. Gotthard Pass, leads from Germany into the heart of Italy.

The Swiss people do not ignore the strategical importance of their territory. Repudiating any and every expansionist or imperialist idea, decided upon unity in times of peace and strict neutrality in times of war, they consider their mission to be that of a sentinel.

By doing this they carry on an old tradition. The district of Uri, which had been promoted to the guardianship of the St. Gotthard, received its reward in 1231 when it was made a free imperial province by Henry, son of Emperor Frederick II of Germany. It was partly with a view to maintaining the security of the traffic across the St. Gotthard that the three first Cantons, Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, became a Federation and thus created Switzerland.

This important and well-guarded highway over the St. Gotthard Pass subsequently served the young Confederation as an expansion axis. That part which traverses Uri, a valley, might be considered as the trunk of the Swiss genealogical tree which gradually spread its branches over eight, then 13 and finally 22 Cantons.

As in the case with every tree that takes root in Alpine territory its growth was difficult. For three centuries the Swiss had to fight for their natural frontiers: the mountains of the Jura, the moat of the Rhone, the rampart of the Alps. After driving the Austrians out of the country, they defeated Charles the Bold, a fact that facilitated the assimilation of the French-speaking Cantons. In the north the last ties with the German Empire were severed. In the south the desire to safeguard the approach to the St. Gotthard Pass took the Confederates right down, beyond the Ticino, a drive which brought them, after a century of fighting and the glorious defeat at Marignano on Sept. 13-14, 1515, to the plains of Lombardy.

Marignano, "a battle of giants" immortalized by Holder, was not only the retreat of an army but of a whole people, decided upon absolute neutrality. This neutrality became effective in 1516, and was recognized by the great powers in 1815.

When, in 1920, Switzerland became a member of the League of Nations on condition that she would not have to furnish troops or allow any to pass through her territory, she guaranteed that she would be "ready to make any sacrifice to defend her own frontiers." Later on Switzerland was exempted from the duty of participating in future sanctions, and thus regained her absolute neutrality.

The battle of Marignano, which was a victory for François I of France, resulted in a real military emigration. Fighting had become a necessity for the Swiss soldiers. Swiss troops were engaged in 59 countries. These troops, whom Napoleon called "my best, because they are courageous and faithful," were contemptuously called mercenaries. Yet these men, who, in d'Ordiac's words, "were venerated by all those for whom honor was a cult and courage a passion," accomplished heroic feats before the eyes of the world, feats which now belong to Swiss moral heritage and by which the Swiss people still benefit.

The Swiss nation is greatly attached to its army, whose rôle it understands and whose importance it appreciates. On several occasions it voted for an extension of the military training periods and accepted the burden of a high insurance premium against war as represented by the Defense budget. Strong fortifications have been erected along the frontiers and also protect the hinterland. The most up-to-date armaments are manufactured in the country itself. The frontier troops occupy the borders in the regions where they live. Behind them the divisions and brigades of the field army, the territorial

battalions and auxiliary services, both male and female, are ever ready.

Switzerland has no "war aims," but should war come every Swiss will know why he is fighting: to safeguard a six-centuries-old independence, a small but precious homeland. And every inch of soil will be defended to the end.

Thus Switzerland, with a firm determination to maintain the country's historic independence found in every class of her population, possesses strength in defense, both technically and morally.

+++++

TOLD SWISS IDEAL WILL LAST FOREVER.

"The ideal of individual freedom shared by America and Switzerland will last as long as Switzerland's mountains; as long as human conscience clings to justice and right," said Dr. Charles Bruggmann, Swiss minister to the United States. Dr. Bruggmann said that Switzerland had founded its federal government on a recognition of the personality of the individual man. The Swiss moral and political conscience demanded, he said, that every citizen must be respected, educated and trained to accept civic responsibility.

"Only when the idea becomes general will peace come to the world," he said. "Only justice and federacy can cure the re-opening wounds of war."

Dr. Bruggmann described how the Swiss spirit of political unity had overcome barriers in religion, language and customs and had given the world an example of a unified nation.

Although the war has caused Switzerland to mobilize an army of 500,000 and has greatly injured its trade, Bruggmann said he was confident Switzerland would remain neutral.

+++++

THE SWISS UNIVERSITY.

Switzerland has seven cantonal universities, and one federal higher seat of learning: the Polytechnical College of Zurich. Eight higher schools of learning in a country with less than half the population of London! This is another proof that Switzerland not only exerted an important influence on contemporary education through the work of Rousseau, the philosopher, and Pestalozzi, the educator, but also that the Swiss people as a whole are ready to consent any sacrifice in view of the education of their own children, and of the children of the world's intellectual elite.

The Swiss universities received the definite impetus for their development from the 19th century idealism. One of them, the University of Basle, was founded forty years before Columbus discovered America. Basle's university was the child of the Renaissance which revived the classical spirit and marked a turning point in the history of mankind. The other Swiss universities came into existence as a result of the second wave of humanitarianism, an intellectual movement which followed in the wake of the French Revolution. The European regeneration of the beginning of the 19th century was not only political in its scope, but spiritual and scholastic as well.

All the Swiss universities are located in the principal old cultural centers of the country, that is to say, in the most important of the canton capitals. Four of them are found in the Germanic part of Switzerland: at Basle, Berne, and Zurich - both a university and a Polytechnical College being located in this latter city. The remaining four universities are to be found in the French-speaking section of Switzerland: at Geneva, Lausanne, Neuchatel, and Fribourg. Thus in educational matters, as in the other realms of Swiss life, there are no unprivileged minorities.