

**Zeitschrift:** The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK  
**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom  
**Band:** - (1982)  
**Heft:** 1787  
  
**Rubrik:** Colin Farmer reporting from Berne

### **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:** 22.02.2026

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

# Why they're confident of nuclear survival



SWITZERLAND'S famous civil defence system gives the population a fair-to-excellent chance of surviving a nuclear war, most Swiss believe.

Seventy per cent of those questioned in a recent survey consider they have at least an even likelihood of survival. Five per cent rated their chances as very good, 24 per cent good and 41 per cent medium. A further 24 per cent of those polled considered the possibility of survival as small or very small.

Hans Mumenthaler, director of the Federal Civil Defence Office – which commissioned the poll – said the results reflected to an encouraging degree the Swiss population's confidence in the government's ambitious civil defence programme.

The programme already guarantees shelter protection for up to 90 per cent of the 6.2 million population in modern, artificially ventilated shelters equipped with purification filters, airtight reinforced doors and escape hatches. The government's aim is to complete this programme before the year 2,000, with a modern shelter place available by then for every single inhabitant of Switzerland.

Until a few years ago the world watched with little more than idle curiosity as the industrious Swiss intensified their anti-catastrophe efforts, busily building and burrowing underground. But now – for much of Western Europe in particular – Switzerland has become a much-envied model of modern civil defence know-how.

Following the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan two years ago, the Federal Civil Defence Office said it was "virtually swamped" with enquiries from foreign authorities, private companies and individuals seeking details of Switzerland's

formidable shelter system.

Most came from Britain, where the Swiss Embassy in London alone said it was receiving up to 50 enquiries daily from citizens made even more uneasy by the strong anti-Soviet stand taken by incoming Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. One Derbyshire farmer said he wanted to build a shelter with enough room for his livestock, and several companies sprang up in London offering specialised services in shelter construction.

But there was little the Swiss could do directly to help the vulnerable British householder. In addition to a nationwide network of public shelters, the Swiss system relies heavily on smaller individual shelters which have been built into the basement of all new homes and offices constructed since the mid-1960s.

The Swiss government has also been distributing to the country's 3,000 municipalities enough "catastrophe nutrition" to keep the entire population going for several days. These emergency survival rations – providing some 1,600 calories per person per day – are in addition to the basic two-week food stock which Swiss housewives are advised by the government to keep constantly on hand. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that most Swiss feel they have a fair to excellent chance of surviving a nuclear holocaust.

Even 15 years ago a special adviser to President Johnson on America's civil defence planning said after visiting Switzerland: "The Swiss system is the best in the world. I myself have been inside shelters in Swiss apartment buildings – and I only wish I had one of them at home."

☆☆☆

SWITZERLAND will resettle 1,000 of an estimated 28,000 Polish refugees living in

camps in Austria, the government has announced.

A 13-strong delegation from the free trade union Solidarity and some Polish tourists are also seeking residence permits after being stranded in Switzerland following December's military crackdown in Poland.

☆☆☆

AN Armenian underground organisation has ordered a halt to bomb attacks in Switzerland and against Swiss targets abroad.

The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), in a statement delivered to a news agency in Beirut, called on militants to cease anti-Swiss operations because of what it said was a new development in the case of an Armenian jailed in Geneva.

But ASALA did not specify what new development there was in the case of Mardiros Jamkodjian, 23, who was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment in December for last year's murder of a Turkish consular employee in that Swiss city.

Following the Geneva case, a French court passed a two-year sentence on a French-Armenian convicted of complicity in an attempt to kill the Turkish ambassador to Switzerland in 1980. But French authorities said the man would be freed almost immediately because of the amount of time he had spent in jail awaiting trial.

The Turkish ambassador had escaped with slight injuries after six shots were fired at him in Berne. His suspected assailant was arrested later in Marseilles, and tried by a French court because France does not extradite its nationals. The prosecution had demanded an eight-year sentence.

The ASALA movement blames Turkey for the massacre in 1915 of about 1.5 million Armenians.

IN a raid reminiscent of the spectacular Great Train Robbery in Britain in 1963, an armed gang last month staged a well planned hold-up on the Genoa-Zurich night express and got away with bulging postal sacks worth nearly Sfr 1.3 million – that's almost £400,000.

One member of the gang pulled the emergency cord just after the train had left Lugano, allowing several accomplices to board the express and force their way into the postal compartment. The gang fled in waiting cars and several of the raiders then escaped across Lake Lugano to Italy – by rowing boat.

But the crime was not quite as perfect as Ticino police first feared. Six days later they discovered near the scene of the hold-up the body of a 26-year-old Italian, who had apparently died of gunshot wounds received during the raid. Not far from his body were several weapons – and two sacks containing Sfr 800,000 in gold bars.

Lugano police have also detained an Italian and two Swiss suspects, and Italian police have made one arrest. Still missing are nearly half a million francs' worth of diamonds and gold.

☆☆☆

**TOURISM** to Switzerland in 1981 broke all previous records, says a government report – but holidays here this year are likely to cost visitors more.

First the good news. Overnight bookings from Swiss and foreign travellers increased more than four per cent last year to an all-time peak of 78 million – more than 35 million in hotels and some 43 million in holiday apartments, camping sites and youth hos-

## Postzugraub bei Lugano nach «englischem Muster»

Mit einer Technik, die an den berühmten Postzugraub in England aus dem Jahre 1963 erinnert, haben am Montagabend fünf bis sechs Banditen wenige Kilometer nördlich von Lugano einen Postwagen des Schnellzuges Genua-Zürich überfallen. Dabei fielen ihnen einige Wertsendungen und zwei Postsäcke mit Briefpost in die Hände. Der genaue Wert der Beute wurde mit 1 584 226 Franken angegeben.

Newspaper headline on the train robbery. See story (left).

tels. The report attributes the record-breaking year to a combination of Switzerland's central location in Europe, value-for-money image, and price stability.

Now the bad news. Hotel rates are being increased this year by about eight per cent and rail fares go up next month by a similar amount. The increases are roughly in line with Switzerland's current annual inflation rate. Hoteliers say their rates have hardly risen since the mid-1970s. And the Federal Railways say higher fares are necessary to offset increased salaries – and a Sfr 600 million annual deficit.

☆☆☆

A **BRONZE** statue of Charlie Chaplin – similar to one in the centre of London – is to be erected this summer near the late comedian's Swiss home in the Lake Geneva village of Corsier.

To be unveiled at one of Chaplin's

favourite lakeside spots, the life-size statue by English sculptor John Doubleday will match one erected in London's Leicester Square a year ago. Chaplin lived in Corsier from 1952 until his death on Christmas Day 1977.

☆☆☆

**SWITZERLAND** is one of the best countries in which to live. But not **THE** best, according to a survey report I've just received from the United States.

The Washington-based Overseas Development Council, a non-profit body studying worldwide environmental and population issues, has compiled a "Physical Quality of Life" index, in which it rates countries on a scale of one to 100. Three factors were used to compile the index – infant mortality, life expectancy, and literacy. Such aspects as income, taxes, housing and other economic measures were not considered.

Sweden got top marks with a 97 rating, and Guinea-Bissau the lowest with 12. Five nations were close behind Sweden with ratings of 96 – Denmark, Iceland, Japan, the Netherlands and Norway. Next on 95, came Switzerland and Canada. Countries rating 94 were Britain, the United States, Finland, France and New Zealand.

Other top ratings were 93 for Australia, Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, West Germany, and Ireland; 92 for Italy and Luxembourg; and 91 for Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Soviet Union and Spain.



**GRAND CONTEST:** 1st prize, one first class return rail ticket Berne-Zurich; 2nd prize, three weeks in Sri Lanka for two persons; 3rd prize, one week in Kenya for two persons . . . See story (above).

**Switzerland's football league programme resumed on February 28 (as this issue of the Swiss Observer was going to press) following the traditional winter break. Latest league tables were published in January's Swiss Observer.**