



Switzerland

by Craig Kaczorowski

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Switzerland, officially known as the Swiss Confederation, is a landlocked country in Western Europe, bordered by Germany, France, Italy, Austria, and Liechtenstein. It has a population of approximately 7.5 million.

Switzerland is a federal republic composed of 26 cantons (i.e., states). Historically, each canton was a self-governed, sovereign state, with its own borders, army, and currency. In 1848, the country's federal structure was established, with each canton retaining some attributes of sovereignty, such as fiscal autonomy and the right to manage internal cantonal affairs.

The canton of Berne is the seat of the federal government. Zurich, the country's largest city, is Switzerland's main commercial and cultural center.

Geneva, Switzerland's second most populous city, is home to numerous international organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), World Trade Organization (WTO), World Health Organization (WHO), and the European Headquarters of the United Nations, the second-largest of the UN's four major office sites (the largest being in New York City).

Switzerland is one of the richest countries in the world. It consistently ranks high on quality of life indices, including highest per capita income, high health care rates, and one of the highest concentrations of computer and Internet usage per capita.

It is also a very cosmopolitan nation with a vibrant glbtq community. Zurich has the largest gay population, with a strong gay presence in its Old Town (Altstadt) area. Switzerland's other major cities, including Geneva, Basel, Berne, and Lausanne, all also have sizable gay and lesbian communities.

However, Switzerland has lagged behind much of Europe, particularly the Nordic countries, but also its neighbors France and Germany, when it comes to gay rights, especially registered domestic partnerships.

Although registered partnerships have existed on a regional level in Switzerland, beginning with the canton of Geneva in 2001, followed by the canton of Zurich in 2002 and the canton of Neuchâtel in 2004, it was not until June 2005 that Swiss voters approved nationwide registered partnerships, granting same-sex couples many of the same legal rights as married heterosexual couples, with the exception of adoption rights and access to fertility treatments. The Swiss Registered Partnership law went into effect on January 1, 2007.

Languages

Switzerland is a multilingual country with four national languages.

Swiss-German, a variation of the German language, is spoken by about 65 percent of the population. French is generally spoken in the canton of Geneva and the surrounding French border areas, while Italian is



Painter Henry Fuseli (1741-1825) is among the first significant glbtq cultural figures in Swiss history.

typically spoken in the southern part of the country.

The fourth national language, Romansh (also spelled Rumantsch, Romansch, or Romanche), a Latin-derived Rhaeto-Romanic language, is spoken almost exclusively in the eastern canton of Graubünden (Grisons). It is Switzerland's least-used national language in terms of number of speakers.

English is often described as the unofficial fifth language of the country.

History

Originally inhabited by the Helvetians, or Helvetic Celts, the territory comprising modern Switzerland came under Roman rule around 58 B.C.E. and remained a Roman province until the fourth century. Several major Swiss cities and towns, including Zurich, Geneva, and Basel, were founded by the Romans. They served as trade arteries between Rome and the northern tribes.

After the decline of the Roman Empire, the area was invaded by Germanic tribes from the north and west and was later conquered by the Franks. In 1032, following the weakening of the Frankish Empire, Switzerland became part of the Holy Roman Empire.

In the thirteenth century, the area was placed under the dominion of the Habsburg Dynasty. On August 1, 1291, the ruling families from the cantons of Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden conspired against the Habsburgs. They formed an "eternal alliance" and founded the first Swiss Confederation. August 1 is consequently celebrated as Switzerland's National Day.

The Swiss Confederation slowly added new cantons and established de facto independence from the Holy Roman Empire in 1499, attaining legal independence at the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

French revolutionary troops occupied the country in 1798 and renamed it the Helvetic Republic, replacing the loose confederation of cantons with a centrally governed unitary state. Independence was restored by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, which reconstituted the old confederation of sovereign states and recognized Switzerland's status of permanent armed neutrality in international law.

In 1848, after a brief civil war lasting less than a month between liberal Protestant and conservative Catholic cantons, the majority of Swiss cantons adopted a federal constitution, which established a range of civic liberties and guaranteed cantonal autonomy.

The Constitution was amended extensively in 1874, establishing a strong central government for defense, trade, and legal matters, while conferring significant powers of control to each canton. It was also amended to permit direct democracy by popular referendum.

Switzerland industrialized rapidly during the nineteenth century. It became the second most industrialized country in Europe, after Great Britain.

During World War I, significant tension developed between the German-, French-, and Italian-speaking areas of the country, and Switzerland came close to violating its neutrality but ultimately managed to stay out of hostilities.

During World War II, Switzerland came under heavy pressure from the fascist powers, which after the fall of France in 1940 completely surrounded the country. Detailed plans for invasion were developed by German forces, but the country was never attacked. A combination of tactical accommodation, economic concessions to Germany, and demonstrative readiness to defend the country helped Switzerland survive the

war inviolate.

However, allegations in the 1990s concerning secret assets of Jewish Holocaust victims deposited in Swiss banks led to international criticism. In 1997, the Swiss government, in cooperation with Swiss companies and banks, established the Swiss Humanitarian Fund to distribute funds to survivors of the Holocaust regardless of the reason for their persecution.

The Swiss gay organization Pink Cross sat on the advisory board of the fund, and made efforts to reach out to gay and lesbian survivors of Nazi atrocities. Eleven survivors were identified, but only seven agreed to file applications to the Swiss fund. Each of them received the equivalent of U.S. \$1,300.

Eight advocacy organizations in Europe, Israel, and the United States working on behalf of gay and lesbian victims of the Nazis formed the Pink Triangle Coalition in 1998 in order to disseminate additional funds and information.

Preferring to retain its neutrality, Switzerland did not elect to join the United Nations when it came into existence in 1945, even though Geneva became host to the organization's European headquarters. However, on September 10, 2002, Switzerland became the 190th member of the United Nations.

In 1963, Switzerland joined the Council of Europe but still remains outside the European Union.

Women were not granted the right to vote or to hold office in Switzerland until 1971. Its first female president, Ruth Dreifuss, was elected in 1999.

GLBTQ Rights

The first gay and lesbian organizations in Switzerland date from the 1930s. "Amicitia" ("Friendship"), a lesbian social organization, was established in Zurich in 1931; "Der Kreis" (The Circle), was founded as a male homosexual group in Zurich in 1932. From these groups grew a homophile journal, *Schweizerisches Freundschafts-Banner* (*Swiss Banner of Friendship*), which began publishing in 1932 to argue for the decriminalization of homosexuality. It would later be renamed *Der Kreis*.

Although the Swiss Federal Assembly had recommended the decriminalization of homosexuality in the early 1930s, the reform did not become official until 1942, making Switzerland among the first European countries to repeal laws prohibiting homosexual acts among adults. The impetus for reform was less a concern for justice and equality under the law than a desire on the part of legislators to remove what they considered a distasteful subject from political debate.

Despite the reform, homosexuality continued to be associated with crime, especially after the 1957 murders of two middle-class gay men by male prostitutes. Gay bars and other meeting places were routinely raided by the police and an official list of "registered homosexuals" was compiled.

In response, new homophile associations were founded to protest harassment and to argue for equal rights. Nonetheless, few advances were made in the area of glbtq rights for the next several decades.

In the 1990s, however, the so-called "Rainbow Culture," a regime of campaigns, activities, and marches by Swiss gay groups, resulted in increased rights.

The Swiss House of Representatives voted in favor of reforming the Penal Code on sexual offenses in December 1990. In a national referendum on May 17, 1992, 73 percent of voters ratified the reform, which eliminated all legal discrimination against homosexuals, including the ban on homosexuals in the armed forces and a discrepancy in the age of consent to engage in homosexual activities.

In August 1994, the Swiss Federated Railways announced reduced fares, and spouse passes for same-sex partners who live together.

While many European countries established registered partnerships and civil unions for same-sex couples, beginning with Denmark in 1989, Switzerland lagged behind.

In 2000 the Swiss government authorized Justice Minister Ruth Metzler to draft a registered-partnership bill for same-sex couples. The bill was introduced into Parliament in 2001.

In May 2001, the canton of Geneva offered a domestic partner registration process or PACS (Pacte civil de solidarité). Unmarried, cohabitating couples, whether same-sex or opposite-sex, were granted similar rights, responsibilities, and protections to those enjoyed by legally married couples, with the exception of rights governed by federal law. By February 2005, 215 same-sex and 54 opposite-sex couples in Geneva took advantage of the law.

The canton of Zurich passed a same-sex partnership law in September 2002, the first in the world to be ratified by a popular referendum. Zurich's law went further than Geneva's partnership registration, offering benefits to same-sex couples in the areas of taxation, inheritance, and social security. The Zurich law, however, required couples to live together for six months in advance of registering. Within one year, 383 same-sex Zurich couples had registered their partnerships.

The canton of Neuchâtel followed suit in July 2004, passing a law legally recognizing unmarried, cohabiting couples. By February 2005, 35 opposite-sex and 21 same-sex couples in Neuchâtel had registered.

In 2004 the Swiss Parliament passed legislation to create a nationwide civil union registry and grant limited rights to same-sex couples--primarily in the areas of pensions, inheritance, and taxes. But opponents, headed by the Federal Democratic Union, a conservative religious party, collected enough signatures to force a referendum on the issue.

This action led to the first occasion in Europe where a nation's voters were asked to decide if gay and lesbian couples should have equal legal rights as married couples. Elsewhere in Europe the decision of how to recognize gay and lesbian partnerships had been decided by governments.

The Swiss government and most political parties supported the measure, as did the Federation of Protestant Churches. Predictably, the Roman Catholic Church opposed it.

On June 5, 2005, Swiss voters approved, by a 58 percent majority, the nationwide registered partnership law. It grants same-sex couples the same rights and protections as legally married couples, including next of kin status, taxation, and social security benefits.

Exceptions are made in regards to adoption rights, access to fertility treatments, and the assumption of the same surname. Additionally, while foreign partners receive residency, a foreign member of a registered partnership does not have the right to a Swiss passport or expedited naturalization.

Partnerships can only be dissolved by a court.

The Swiss Registered Partnership law went into effect on January 1, 2007.

Significant Swiss GLBTQ Cultural Figures

One of the first figures in early Swiss glbtq history is the Swiss-born draftsman and writer painter Henry

Fuseli (1741-1825), who, however, spent most of his life in England. Born Johann Heinrich Füssli on February 6, 1741 in Zurich, the artist adopted an anglicized version of his name when he settled permanently in England in 1764. He is best-known for the painting *The Nightmare*, a memorable image of a woman in the throes of a violently erotic dream, but he also produced paintings and drawings of both heterosexual and homosexual subjects.

Another prominent individual in early Swiss gay history is the writer and government official Charles-Victor de Bonstetten (1745-1832). It has long been speculated that Bonstetten, during his early twenties, was the object of affection of the homosexual English poet Thomas Gray (1716-1771).

In December 1769, the young Swiss aristocrat, living in London to improve his English, was introduced to the much older Gray. Shortly after this introduction, Bonstetten moved with Gray to Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, where he lived close to Gray's lodgings and spent his evenings in Gray's rooms. In a January 1770 letter to his confidante, Rev. Norton Nicholls, Gray wrote: "I never saw such a boy: our breed is not made on this model."

Bonstetten was obliged to return to Switzerland at the end of three months, but the two men were known to have corresponded regularly until Gray's death in 1771, although few of Bonstetten's letters have survived.

Bonstetten's best-known work is *The Man of the North and the Man of the South; or the Influence of Climate (L'Homme du Midi et L'Homme du Nord, ou L'influence du Climat, 1824)*, an anthropological study of the influence of climate on human development.

Bonstetten went on to become the presumed lover of the Swiss historian and public official Johannes von Müller (1752-1809). Several love letters between Bonstetten and Müller have survived.

Müller spent much of his life in Germany, where he held political posts under the prince-elector of Mainz, the king of Prussia, and King Jérôme Bonaparte of Westphalia. His five-volume history of Switzerland, published between 1786 and 1808, was greatly acclaimed during his lifetime as the definitive account of Swiss history.

The Swiss anthologist, milliner, and interior designer Heinrich Hössli (1784-1864), is the author of *Eros*, a two-volume defense of love between men that appeared in 1836 and 1838. They were the first books to appear in modern Europe to publicly defend same-sex desire.

Hössli argued that male-male sexuality is as natural as a man's love for a woman, and that the proclivity toward same-sex love is inborn. Drawing on Greek classics and poetry from Turkey, Persia, and Arabia, he argued that same-sex desire is universal and urged the repeal of legal prohibitions against homosexual activity.

In his own time, the volumes garnered no critical recognition or popularity. They were not reprinted in their entirety until 1996.

The widely-traveled Swiss writer and photojournalist Annemarie Schwarzenbach (1908-1942) wrote about same-sex desire and documented the social and economic upheavals of her time. She was born into a world of privilege as the daughter of one of Switzerland's wealthiest textile industrialists.

Although married in 1935 to the French diplomat Claude Clarac, who was also homosexual, Schwarzenbach was romantically involved with several women, beginning with Erika Mann, the daughter of novelist Thomas Mann, whom she met in 1930.

She teamed up personally and professionally with the American photographer Barbara Hamilton-Wright in 1937. The two women traveled through a Depression-stricken United States, which resulted in a series of articles for the European press on America's race and class relations, illustrated by Hamilton-Wright's photographs.

In 1940, while back in the United States, Schwarzenbach entered into a self-destructive affair with the wealthy émigrée Margo von Opel. During this time, she also met the writer Carson McCullers, who fell hopelessly (and unrequitedly) in love with her. When her relationship with Opel ended badly, Schwarzenbach attempted suicide and McCullers nursed her back to health.

Schwarzenbach began writing fiction while at the University of Zurich, which she entered in 1927. She published her first novel *Friends of Bernhard* (*Freunde um Bernhard*), which had a gay male protagonist, in 1931. In 1933, her *Lyric Novella* (*Lyrische Novelle*) was published as a heterosexual romance, but she later acknowledged that the story had been based on one of her lesbian relationships: "The twenty-year-old hero is not a hero, not a boy, but a girl--that should have been admitted," she wrote several years later.

In 1935 she wrote *Death in Persia* (*Tod in Persien*), not published until 1998, an autobiographical novel that she later reworked into *The Happy Valley* (*Das Glückliche Tal*, 1940), a mixture of travel writing, autobiography, and critical commentary.

In 1941 she began work on a new novel, but died a year later of head injuries sustained in a bicycle accident.

Schwarzenbach's works were rediscovered and republished in the 1980s.

The Swiss-born lesbian artist Sonja Sekula (1918-1963) created a varied and distinctive body of small-scale abstract images.

In 1935, at the age of seventeen, she met and fell deeply in love with Annemarie Schwarzenbach, but their relationship was cut short a year later when Sekula's father abruptly decided to move the family to New York.

Sekula studied art at Sarah Lawrence College and at the Art Students' League, and exhibited her works at New York's Peggy Guggenheim and Betty Parsons galleries in the 1940s and 1950s.

Sekula suffered several nervous breakdowns and periods of confinement in sanitariums throughout her life. She made her first attempt at suicide in 1938. In 1963, at the age of 45, she hanged herself in her studio in Zurich.

Following her death, her work was largely forgotten until 1971, when Finch College in Manhattan held a small exhibition of some of the most important paintings of her New York years. Sekula is now regarded in her native Switzerland as one of the most important artists of the twentieth century, although her work is still not widely known elsewhere.

Anna Vock, Karl Meier and *Der Kreis*

Anna Vock (1885-1962) was one of Switzerland's leading gay and lesbian rights activists. In 1931 she helped establish the women's social organization "Amicitia" ("Friendship"), with the purpose of bringing lesbians out of their isolation and giving them a sense of solidarity.

In 1932 she collaborated on the homophile publication *Freundschafts-Banner (Banner of Friendship)*, which was renamed *Menschenrecht (Human Rights)* in 1937, and later became *Der Kreis (The Circle)*, under the direction of the actor and editor Karl Meier (1897-1974). This journal was one of the most important, regularly-issued gay and lesbian publications in Europe until it ceased publication in 1967.

Although Vock had used her real name in early articles in the journal, it was soon decided that all articles should be published under an assumed name. Vock began publishing under the name "Mamma" (Italian for "Little Mother").

Meier first appeared in the journal in 1934, under the name R. Rheiner (he was born Rudolf Carl Rheiner and later adopted by Thomas and Wilhelmine Meier). He also used the names Gaston Dubois and, later, Rolf.

Vock increasingly gave Meier greater responsibilities for the publication, but remained responsible for the women's pages. In 1943 the journal began incurring financial difficulties and Meier took over the editorship, renaming the periodical *Der Kreis*.

Meier had worked closely with Vock and remained one of her greatest admirers. They stayed in regular contact with one another until Vock's death in Zurich on December 14, 1962. Meier concluded his obituary for Vock, published in *Der Kreis*, with the words: "Farewell, Mamma. Your name will forever remain bound with our cause in Switzerland. You prepared the ground on which we must build. We hope we shall succeed."

That issue also contained a pseudonymously-published note of thanks from the woman who was Vock's companion for some five decades. The identity of Vock's companion is still unknown.

With the decriminalization of homosexuality in Switzerland in 1942, *Der Kreis* steadily became less militant and concentrated more on cultural issues. It also became trilingual, with articles appearing in German, French, and English.

In the 1960s, readership of *Der Kreis* declined when new, more liberal gay periodicals, often with photographs of frontal male nudity, began appearing from Germany and Scandinavia. The journal finally ceased publication in 1967.

Meier died in Zurich on March 29, 1974.

Switzerland's GLBTQ Organizations and Pride Events

Pink Cross, the national Swiss glbtq rights organization, works on behalf of the glbtq community regarding legal equality and social justice. The organization was founded on June 5, 1993 and currently has offices in Berne and Geneva. It is funded exclusively by contributions from its members.

Geneva is the home of several other glbtq groups. Lestime is the city's major lesbian organization. Dialogai is the oldest gay organization in Geneva and has been a central hub for Geneva's gay community since 1982. Dialogai is also home to Checkpoint, a testing center where gay men can get tested anonymously for HIV and other STDs.

The Gay International Group (GIG) is the only glbtq organization in Switzerland solely dedicated to expatriate gays and glbtq tourists. The group was founded in 1994 and offers a range of cultural and sporting events, as well as an informal meeting space.

Zurich has two annual glbtq pride events: the Christopher Street Day parade, held in mid-June, and the three-day Zurich Pride Festival, in early August. The Pride Festival is the largest annual glbtq event in

Switzerland. The event culminates with a city-wide parade, and attracts thousands of visitors with exhibitions, political debates, seminars, and many other activities.

The Warmer Mai Gay Festival, also held in Zurich, throughout the month of May, features a range of activities and events, including art exhibitions, sporting tournaments, dance workshops, cabarets, and theme parties, which take place in the city's many bars and clubs. The idea behind the Festival is to encourage the public to see, hear, and experience the wide diversity of cultural works by gay men and lesbians. Warmer Mai was first held in 2000 and has grown to become one of the most important Swiss cultural events of the year.

The Warmer Mai Festival is host to the annual glbtq film festival, Pink Apple, held at the beginning of May in Zurich and Frauenfeld. The film festival owes its name to its origins in 1997 in the neighboring city of Frauenfeld, the home of Switzerland's apples. The festival screens films of all genres and lengths about gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender issues.

The city of Berne is also the host of the Queersicht Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, held each year in November.

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About the Author

Craig Kaczorowski writes extensively on media, culture, and the arts. He holds an M.A. in English Language and Literature, with a focus on contemporary critical theory, from the University of Chicago. He comments on national media trends for two newspaper industry magazines.