



# Mission August 1<sup>st</sup>



Dear Swiss citizens, dear friends of Switzerland,

Who could have imagined that 2020 would be marked by a global pandemic which would profoundly affect our lives? Many people are still suffering from COVID-19 and its social and economic consequences, and I wish to express my sincere sympathy to all

those affected.

At the Swiss Embassy, the activities that should have kept us busy during the first half of the year, especially those related to the UEFA EURO football championship, with two matches of the Swiss national football team in Baku, have been postponed to 2021. This does not mean, however, that the Embassy has been inactive. Other tasks took on great importance from the very beginning of the crisis, such as supporting Swiss nationals, informing about measures related to visa and, of course, organizing the work of the Embassy taking into account the quarantine regime.

This edition of the newsletter reflects these changed circumstances, with fewer events having been organized, but some important news concerning the life of the Embassy. In particular, Mr Alberto Hernandez took up his duties as Deputy Head of Mission and Deputy Regional Director of Cooperation in January 2020. And Ms Irina Vogel, academic intern at the Embassy, is completing at the end of July a year spent in Baku.

Due to the current circumstances, we will unfortunately not be able to organize the traditional reception for the Swiss National Day (1 August). However, I invite all of you to get a taste of Switzerland and celebrate our National Day in a digital manner, by **visiting the website "Mission August 1<sup>st</sup>"** from 27 July. In the meantime, watch the **greetings of the President of the Swiss Confederation, Ms Simonetta Sommaruga, for the Swiss abroad.**

The whole team of the Embassy wishes you a happy 1 August and a hopefully relaxing summer. Stay healthy!

Yours sincerely,  
Muriel Peneveyre

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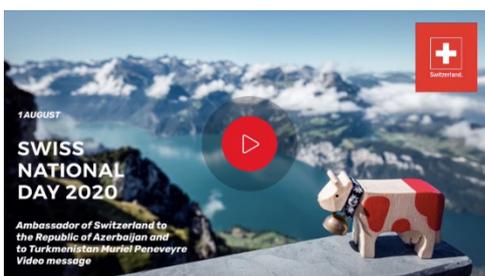
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**Video message** – ambassador's greetings for Swiss citizens and friends of Switzerland in Azerbaijan on the occasion of the Swiss National Day

## Politics, Economy

### Swiss and Azerbaijani Presidents met in Davos



On 22 January, the President of the Swiss Confederation Simonetta Sommaruga and the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev met in Davos on the margins of the World Economic Forum.

They exchanged about the wide-ranging relations between Switzerland and Azerbaijan, including bilateral and regional topics.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8vrKhE3wrw>

### Switzerland and Turkmenistan hold political consultations



On 20 May 2020, political consultations were held online between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland and of Turkmenistan. The Swiss delegation was led by Ambassador Anna Ifkovits Horner, Head of the Division "Europe, Central Asia, Council of Europe and OSCE" of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, while the Turkmen delegation was headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Vepa Hajiev. Topics related to bilateral and multilateral cooperation have been discussed on this occasion.

### Swiss business community comes together

A Swiss Business Lunch, gathering representatives of Swiss companies in Azerbaijan, took place on 13 February 2020 at the Ambassador's residence. We had the pleasure to welcome as Guest Speaker Ms. Kristina Mammadova, Acting Secretary General of the National Confederation of Entrepreneurs Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan (ASK).



# Swiss International Cooperation

## SECO and IFC help to promote electronic payment services



Amid the coronavirus pandemic, digital and contactless means of payment can contribute to reducing the spread of the virus. The Government of Switzerland, through the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), joins efforts with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and some local banks to promote such kind of payments in Azerbaijan. In the framework of the project called *Electronic and Digital Financial Services*, IFC has developed three clips to raise the awareness of digital banking services.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=an2m6gzW5IU&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=an2m6gzW5IU&feature=emb_logo)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPGKmNP4Pk0&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPGKmNP4Pk0&feature=emb_logo)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7uO2sNgvOU&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7uO2sNgvOU&feature=emb_logo)

## New phase of cooperation with the State Tax Service



The Government of Switzerland, through the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), continues its support to the State Tax Service under the Ministry of Economy of Azerbaijan.

The Global Tax Program, which is being implemented by the World Bank and was renewed until June 2022, focuses on the accuracy of taxpayer registry, the risk management framework as well as on the challenges of the informal economy. Acknowledging the current challenges due to COVID-19, the program will also finance short-term just-in-time activities, which will be closely developed with the local authorities.

# Culture & Education

## Embassy holds annual Alumni event

On 12 March, the Embassy of Switzerland hosted the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the annual Alumni reception.

Ambassador Muriel Peneveyre welcomed Azerbaijani alumni at her residence, stressing their valuable contribution to deepening the friendly relations between our two countries.



## Short film about gender-related issues screened in Baku



A screening of the short film “Two Snaps of Post-Modern Society” took place at the Salaam Cinema on 31 January, followed by a debate among the audience and invited experts. The film addresses gender-related issues both in rural and urban Azerbaijan. The Swiss Cooperation Office had supported the short film’s production through its small Arts and Culture project.

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## Consular Affairs

### COVID-19 - Support to Swiss citizens living in Azerbaijan

Due to the worldwide spread of COVID-19 or to personal reasons, some Swiss citizens residing in Azerbaijan and in Turkmenistan had the strong wish to return to their families in Switzerland. Due to the lack of scheduled passenger flights, the Swiss Embassy in Baku has supported them in looking for an alternative mode of transport.

Thanks to the cooperation with other Embassies in Baku and Ashgabat which organized repatriation flights, five Swiss citizens residing in Azerbaijan were able to fly to Rome and Riga, and one Swiss citizen residing in Turkmenistan to Paris.

However, the majority of our fellow citizens remained in Azerbaijan despite the pandemic.

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### COVID-19 – Visa for Switzerland

Due to the rapid increase of COVID-19 cases in March, on 18.03.2020 the Swiss Federal Council decided to suspend with immediate effect the issuance of all Schengen as well as national visa for Switzerland. Thanks to the improvement of the epidemiological situation in Switzerland, the entry restrictions have been lifted on 08.06.2020 for study and family reunification purposes, on 15.06.2020 for all citizens of Schengen, EU and EFTA states and since 06.07.2020 for all stays of more than 90 days. Such long-term stays must however be authorized by the competent cantonal migration office in advance. Short stays of less than 90 days in Switzerland are still subject to restrictions. Switzerland intends to gradually lift these last entry restrictions in coordination with the other Schengen states.

Please note that travellers from several countries, including Azerbaijan, have to undergo a 10-day quarantine upon arrival in Switzerland. The list of the countries concerned, which is based on epidemiological criteria, will be updated regularly and can be found on the webpage of the [Swiss Federal Office of Public Health](#).

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### COVID-19 – Appointments for consular issues

If you wish to visit the Embassy, please take an appointment in advance by telephone or e-mail. Please send your written inquiries to [baku@eda.admin.ch](mailto:baku@eda.admin.ch).

Please do not forget to always **keep the Embassy updated about any changes of addresses, e-mail-addresses, phone numbers, civil status, births of children etc.** Many thanks!



## Embassy news

### Alberto Hernandez, new Deputy Regional Director of Cooperation and Deputy Head of Mission



Mr Alberto Hernandez was appointed Deputy Regional Director of Cooperation and Deputy Head of Mission in January 2020; in this capacity, he heads the Swiss Cooperation Office in Baku (SCO). Previously, he had worked with the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and was responsible for the strategic and political positioning of SECO's economic cooperation. In this function, he worked on the elaboration of a new strategy for Swiss International Cooperation 2021-2024, which is currently being discussed in the Swiss Parliament. The thematic focus areas of the new strategy are: creating

decent jobs locally, mitigating climate change and adapting to its effects, reducing the causes of irregular migration and promoting the rule of law. Looking ahead, still greater use will be made of the potential of the private sector and digitalisation. Multilateralism remains an important pillar of Switzerland's international cooperation.

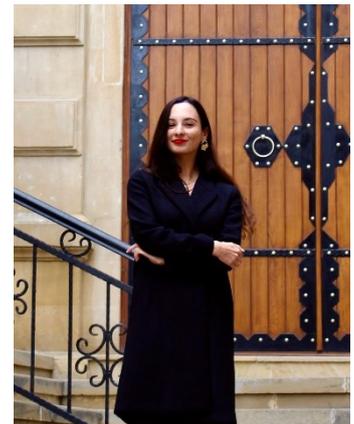
Previously, Alberto Hernandez worked with the Swiss Ministry of Environment and in the private sector. The SCO in Baku implements various projects within the framework of the Swiss Cooperation Strategy South Caucasus. The focus is on the promotion of reliable macroeconomic framework conditions and the promotion of the private sector to create decent income opportunities as well as the implementation of projects in the areas of Women Economic Empowerment, Climate Change and Arts & Culture.

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### Irina Vogel, Academic Intern, says good-bye to Baku – interview

*What were your motivations when applying for the position as an Academic Intern at the Embassy of Switzerland to Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan?*

I have always been fascinated by foreign cultures and the complexity of international affairs. My Bachelor studies in International Relations at the University of Geneva as well as my exchange semester in Tokyo confirmed my desire to work in a diverse environment to find solutions to today's global challenges. Gaining an insight into Swiss diplomacy and understanding the functioning of a Swiss representation abroad constitute valuable experiences and show me in what ways the Swiss foreign policy strives to ensure peace and security as well as economic prosperity abroad. Azerbaijan's multiculturalism and its unique geopolitical situation made Baku an attractive choice for my first experience in this field.



*Describe a normal day at the Embassy. What are your daily tasks? What have you enjoyed most during your internship?*

No two days are the same. Working in a small team, I have had the opportunity to get insights into different diplomatic divisions, which allows for a great variety of tasks but also the challenge to familiarize myself with new topics within a short period of time.

Assisting in the preparation of the visit of the former President of the Swiss Council of States in October 2019 shaped the beginning of a highly diverse internship during which I have had to, inter alia, do research on various topics, draw up reports, attend meetings and conferences, and organize cultural events – some of which had unfortunately to be cancelled shortly before their implementation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

What I have enjoyed most is learning something new every day and seeing the impact of projects supported by our Swiss Cooperation Office.

*Which non-work-related experience stood out the most to you?*

In the first few months of my internship, I had the possibility to travel to different parts of the country. My short trip to Nakhchivan with its beautiful landscapes was especially memorable.

I have noticed that Azerbaijanis – just like Swiss – are very helpful. It is not uncommon to be approached by locals who offer their help with one's groceries or to be invited for tea to get introduced to their customs once they realize they are talking to a foreigner. Azerbaijanis are well known for their warmth and hospitality.

I highly recommend everyone interested in learning more about the Swiss foreign policy and in discovering new cultures to apply for an internship at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs!

## The next federal popular vote takes place on 27 September 2020



The next popular vote at federal level will take place in Switzerland on 27 September 2020.

Five proposals concerning immigration limitation, law on hunting, tax deductions for children, paternity leave, and new fighter aircraft will be voted on.

Learn more about these five proposals on the following website:

<https://www.admin.ch/gov/de/start/dokumentation/abstimmungen/20200927.html>

## Media

Interview of Ambassador Muriel Peneveyre:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIPnwix6UEY&fbclid=IwAR0YSqsHK5qond2rfXrByfjPo1OQ7FLPATOxd-cSa1xta26gOnws\\_nZsoPo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIPnwix6UEY&fbclid=IwAR0YSqsHK5qond2rfXrByfjPo1OQ7FLPATOxd-cSa1xta26gOnws_nZsoPo)

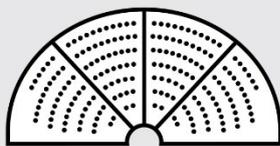
Interview of the Deputy Regional Director Alberto Hernandez:

<https://news.az/news/swiss-embassy-second-phase-of-global-tax-program-will-contribute-to-reforms-in-azerbaijan>

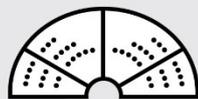
## Facts & Figures



# 2 CHAMBERS — 1 PARLIAMENT



National Council (200)



Council of States (46)

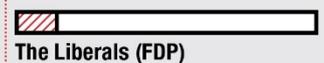
The Swiss Parliament (Federal Assembly) is the highest legislative authority at federal level. It is made up of 246 representatives elected by the people. They are from 12 parties and sit in two chambers.

The Federal Assembly is a semi-professional parliament, with most council members also pursuing a profession. The two chambers meet 4 times a year for 3 weeks each and at least once a year together. The sessions are open to the public.

Since 1971 (when they obtained the right to vote) the proportion of women in National Council has risen from 5% to 42%.



The parties with the most seats in Nationalrat:



## Swiss links



ch.ch

Information about Swiss Administration: [www.ch.ch](http://www.ch.ch)

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Switzerland.

Discover Switzerland: [www.swissworld.org](http://www.swissworld.org)

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Switzerland Tourism: [www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com)

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Auslandschweizer-Organisation  
Organisation des Suisses de l'étranger  
Organizzazione degli Svizzeri all'estero  
Organizaziun dals Svizzers a l'ester

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad: [www.aso.ch](http://www.aso.ch)

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