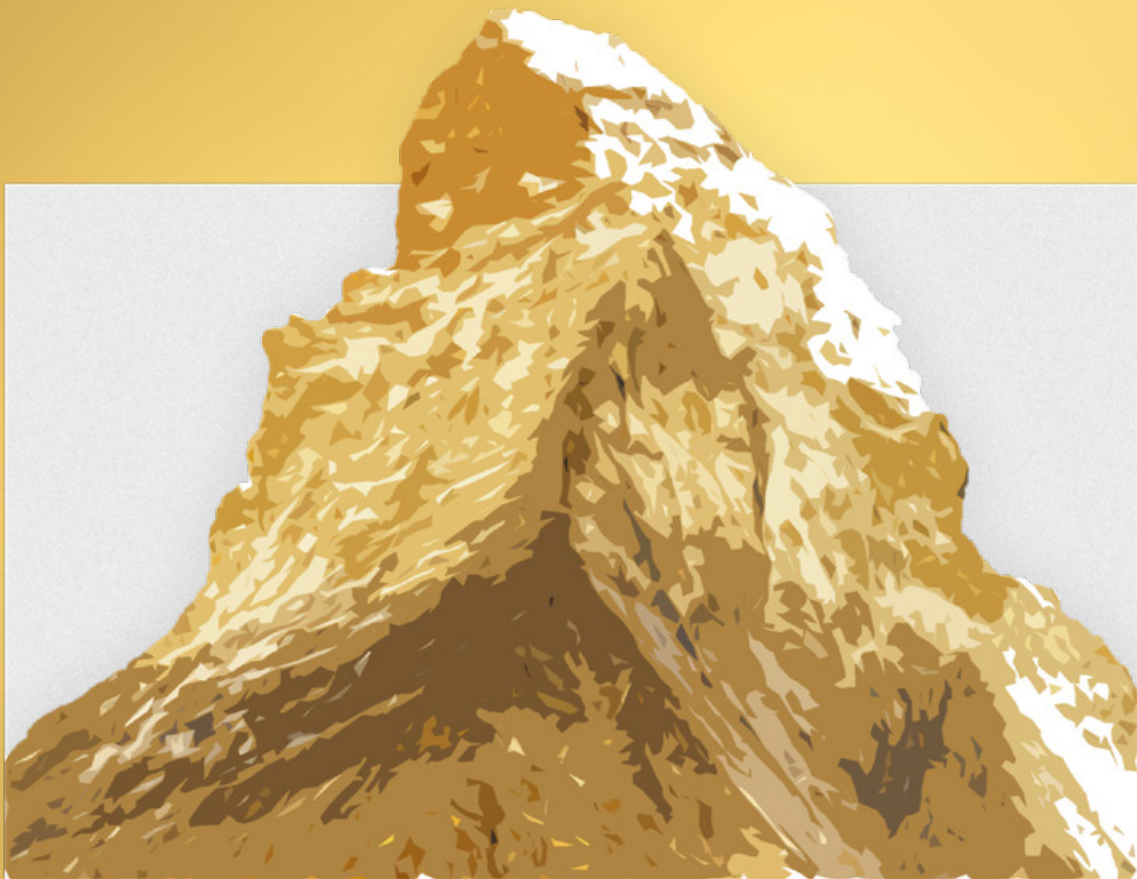




# SWISS RUSSIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



**Annual Report 2024**

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Chamber of Commerce



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# SVETLANA CHIRIAEVA

President of the Swiss Russian Chamber of Commerce

Dear members and interested parties,

In times of global crises and armed conflicts, people are once again reflecting on their existential needs, such as security, work and daily bread.

Why do many people today see Switzerland as a “safe haven”?

In Switzerland's almost thousand-year history, the three main pillars of its political system have emerged:

## 1. Armed neutrality

- Article 2 of the Swiss Constitution states that the Confederation protects the freedom and rights of the people and maintains the independence and security of the country.
- In addition, according to Article 58, an army should serve to prevent war and maintain peace.
- When Switzerland joined the UN, it was stated that neutrality refers to interstate conflicts, but does not call into question the obligations of the UN Charter, in particular the support of UN sanctions (Art. 197).

## 2. Switzerland's tradition of hosting international offices and its commitment to international humanitarian law:

- Switzerland made significant contributions to the Hague Convention (1907) and the Geneva Conventions (1929/1977), which regulate the protection of victims of armed conflicts.
- The founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross (1863) by the Swiss General Henri Dufour and Switzerland's long standing tradition as host for international agencies and good offices for crisis and conflict management are further important components of Swiss foreign policy.

## 3. Consistent compliance by Switzerland with its obligations under international treaties:

- Last but not least, Switzerland is known for adhering to its obligations under state treaties and international law, which is a sign of political stability.
- With the sound monetary policy of the Swiss National Bank and the strong Swiss franc, Switzerland is justifiably considered a "safe haven" for savings from all over the world.
- With USD \$1.83 trillion of bank deposits, Switzerland is often considered the “largest asset manager in the world”.





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# ZURICH

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Swiss Russian  
Chamber of Commerce

# ABOUT THE SWISS RUSSIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Swiss Russian Chamber of Commerce (SRCC) assists private companies, public organisations and individuals in growing by developing the most popular and collaborative business network.

Our non-profit and non-governmental association is open to all institutions and individuals that have an interest in building bridges between Russia and Switzerland. It is fully financed from membership fees.

The Swiss Russian Chamber of Commerce is an officially registered entity and has its headquarters in Zurich.

## WHY JOIN OUR NETWORK?

### HAVE A VOICE TOGETHER WITH THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND ITS MEMBERS

Networking

Visibility

Business support

Lead generation

Credibility

Insights





# WE ARE ACTIVE YEAR-ROUND

Business is always on the move, and so are we. The Swiss-Russian Chamber of Commerce is here for its members 24/7. We've got a lineup of activities and exciting milestones happening every year, keeping things lively and the network growing.

## AFTERWORK EVENTS IN ZURICH

The Chamber hosts after-work meetings several times a year, providing a platform for professionals to connect. These gatherings facilitate the building of valuable business relationships in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.

Beyond fostering connections, the events serve as an excellent introduction for potential members to engage with the vibrant SRCC community.

Initially, our after-work meetings were planned for people of Swiss-Russian interests, but over time they turned into international meetings with participants from more than 20 countries. Business meetings usually take place on our terrace in Zollikon (Zurich), which offers a picturesque view of the lake.

## WEBINARS & BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

At the Swiss-Russian Chamber of Commerce, we actively capitalize on timely and compelling topics, as well as promote promising business opportunities. Our commitment to keeping our community informed and engaged is reflected in the organization of webinars. These virtual sessions, carefully curated to suit the dynamic needs of our Swiss-Russian audience, serve as invaluable platforms for knowledge-exchange and networking.

These webinars not only provide a comprehensive overview of the subject matter but also pave the way for our members to establish meaningful connections and collaborations.

## **THE VOICE OF THE SWISS-RUSSIAN BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

Whenever the situation demands, we gladly offer insights and contributions to address emerging challenges or opportunities.

On the event front, we actively participate in business gatherings alongside officials and influential figures in the industry. A testament to our dedication, the President of the Swiss Russian Chamber of Commerce is a notable presence at events such as the SPIEF, attending in person and extending the invitation to interested members.

Moreover, we efficiently handle media requests from prestigious TV channels and newspapers, seizing the opportunity to articulate our vision and champion the interests of our Chamber. By actively participating in high-profile events and engaging with the media, we reinforce our commitment to advancing the objectives of our members and promoting a robust Swiss-Russian business community.

## **CASUAL NETWORKING**

We recognize the significance of fostering connections in diverse and informal settings. Hence, we regularly extend invitations to our members for casual networking events hosted at various unofficial, cultural, or otherwise unconventional venues. These relaxed gatherings offer a refreshing departure from traditional business environments, providing our community with the chance to engage in meaningful conversations and build relationships in a more laid-back atmosphere.

These culturally-infused gatherings provide not only a unique backdrop for networking but also a platform for members to appreciate and celebrate the rich heritage shared between Switzerland and Russia.

## **CONNECTING SWISS-RUSSIAN JOB SEEKERS WITH EMPLOYERS**

In the Swiss-Russian business landscape, there is a high demand for professionals with specialized skills in areas such as culture, language, logistics, or finance. The Swiss-Russian Chamber of Commerce actively bridges the gap between employers seeking specific talents and qualified job seekers within our community.

Whether a member company is scouting for adept individuals to join their team or a talented professional is eager to explore new career avenues, we try to create a business connection. By facilitating these connections, we contribute to the vitality of businesses within our network and provide individuals with opportunities that align seamlessly with their expertise and aspirations.



# SRCC MEMBERS THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR DEVELOPMENT

Our members enable our growth. Membership fees from individuals and companies are responsible for our continuing development. As a non-profit organisation, we completely finance our own structure and tools. Every subscription increases our means to hire staff and enact ambitious projects.

All our activities are exclusively dedicated to the development of our community and the creation of business connections between Swiss-based and Russian-based professionals.

## AN IDEAL OPPORTUNITY FOR VOLUNTEERS

Each of our new projects and every new contact contributes to our daily growth. We operate like a startup, relying on hard skills and positive mindsets to initiate and carry out our innovative and ambitious projects.

The Chamber seeks professionals based in Switzerland or Russia who, on a voluntary basis, could take on specific topics or help us during unique events. Many tasks can be performed remotely.

At the moment, we are especially looking for volunteers with the following skills:

- Administration
- Marketing
- Translation
- Social Media
- Events
- Photo/Video
- Web/Digital
- Organisation

## OUR REVENUE SOURCES



# MEMBERSHIP FOR COMPANIES

**BUSINESS**  
CHF 4.950,-

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**MEMBER OF THE ADVISORY BOARD**

**PREMIUM**  
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Company profile  
Part of the SRCC list of suppliers  
Page in the SRCC online brochure  
Possibility to publish in the news feed

**STANDARD**  
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Consulting & Daily business  
Networking  
Lobbying & Representation  
Community development

# MEMBERSHIP FOR INDIVIDUALS

**STANDARD**  
CHF 295,-

Source of information  
Consulting & Daily business  
Networking  
Lobbying & Representation  
Community development  
Using the "Top Candidate" pool



## ST Med in Zurich:

### FOR PATIENTS WITH HIGH HEALTH DEMANDS

**The centrally located modern medical practice ST Med in Zurich offers exclusive, innovative treatments for people who want to age healthily. Or want to lose weight successfully with natural Chrono Nutrition - without surgery.**

ST Med is a state-of-the-art group practice, well established since 2019. Our strengths include innovative health concepts and individual examinations by highly qualified doctors. We treat not only sick patients, but all those who want to optimize their health in order to age healthily.

One of our most popular signature treatments is [Chrono Nutrition](#). The concept to lose weight successfully and healthily was developed by CEO Dr. Tatjana Bubanj Somborski, MD - based on the latest scientific findings. The method makes it possible to lose weight enjoyably, sustainably and without yo-yo effect. The only thing you need to learn is to eat the right food at the right time to get rid of excess pounds. This unique concept is based on chronobiology, which was awarded the [Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2017](#). ST Med is the only medical practice in Switzerland to professionally offer this effective and forward looking slimming concept.

Our second specialty is [Healthy Aging](#). Healthy aging means aging healthily to feel fit and well in later life.

Whether young adults or already at retirement age: everyone can influence their aging process. Those who know their weak points – and these differ from person to person – can take (simple) measures to reduce their health risks. In order to identify your personal “danger spots”, we carry out various laboratory and body examinations that measure your current state of health. ST Med offers [3 different prevention programs](#) to optimize your health.

We also offer [classical medical treatments](#): for patients in the family doctor model (Swiss health insurance).



# ST Med

Healthcare & Nutrition Center



**We look forward  
to meeting you  
and optimizing  
your health!**



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# ENERGY CHALLENGES AND THE BEST **UN**AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGIES

## OIL & GAS

The events of the last two years have shown the possibility of a relatively quick transition from one energy source to another (Europe in 2022-2023 quickly switched from pipeline gas to LNG, resumed the use of coal and stimulated the development of renewable energy sources, etc.). The resistance of the global oil market has demonstrated the stability of the economic principles of the commodity market (raw materials for which it practically does not matter who, where and how they were produced) against the introduction of restrictions and artificial price ceilings.

Similar processes can be observed in the gas market. It is important to understand that, unlike pipeline supplies, which depend on long-term contracts and availability of infrastructure, LNG supplies can change dynamically depending on market conditions. An LNG tanker leaving an LNG port can often be resold during transportation, meaning LNG supplies are very flexible and practically interchangeable. Accordingly, if the EU stops receiving Russian LNG, Russia will seek to sell this LNG to other regions, while EU buyers will seek alternative supplies. Thus, when trade restrictions are introduced, the global LNG market, like the oil market, is rebalanced, however, such "rebalancing" leads to additional economic and environmental costs, an increase in the carbon footprint caused by less efficient trade routes. This issue has become especially important in connection with the aggravation of geopolitical confrontation in the Middle East and the Red Sea, which has led to the fact that some LNG and oil tankers are redirected bypassing Africa.

Clearly, burning natural gas is equally damaging to the environment whether it is supplied by pipeline or as LNG. Gazprom has repeatedly stated the environmental advantages of pipeline gas over LNG; this, due to Gazprom's obvious interest, was certainly viewed with skepticism in the expert community. However, with LNG supplies to Europe and the UK rising sharply in recent months, the issue of environmental sustainability of LNG supplies has come to the fore.

This is stated in the Rystad report Energy<sup>1</sup>, which indicates that the production and transportation of LNG can produce 10 times more carbon emissions

than pipeline gas, although LNG is often presented as a cleaner alternative. This is because LNG is a natural gas that is cooled to extremely low temperatures, typically around -160°C, while being compressed to reduce its volume to reduce transportation costs. These processes are extremely energy-consuming and, accordingly, not environmentally friendly. Thus, the Rystad study argues, if Russian gas supplies were completely cut off, and all this additional gas came in the form of LNG, this could result in an additional 35 million tons of carbon emissions compared to 2021.

## BEST AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGIES

Best available technologies (BAT) have been used as a tool for minimizing industrial emissions and environmental modernization of industry and energy since the 90s. Most of the advanced BAT assessment methods have been developed and implemented in accordance with the European Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) and Industrial Emissions Directives. BAT in the European Union is defined and reviewed through a formal framework: the Seville Process that has been developed over more than 20 years. It establishes a transparent and fact-based step-by-step procedure for the exchange of information between stakeholders, involving a wide range of participants, supported by data analysis and expert opinion. It was adapted internationally, despite of known problems of this process related to the complexity of working with source data, transparency, length of procedures, and difficulties in achieving consensus.

Since 2016, the OECD has been leading the BAT project that aims to identify and share best practices between countries that already have BAT-based policies in place to promote the prevention and control of industrial pollution. The project is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as it contributes to the implementation of activities aimed at achieving several SDGs and related targets related to both SDG 12 "Responsible consumption and production" in particular target 12.4 on sustainable use of chemicals, reduction emissions of harmful chemicals, and with other goals: SDG 6: Clean Water, SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy, GOAL 9: Industrialization, Innovation and Infrastructure, etc.

1 - <https://www.enr.com/news/2022/11/03/lng-is-creating-10-times-the-emissions-of-pipeline-gas/>

Little is known about the causal mechanisms through which, directly or indirectly, economic sanctions may cause environmental damage. Without studying such mechanisms, it is impossible to separate the impact of sanctions from the impact of other variables (for example, the results of poor production decisions, corruption, mismanagement, natural variability and climate change). It is impossible to identify one driving force and root cause of the problem of environmental degradation in a complex human-environment system. On the same basis, it is impossible to separate the impact of sanctions from other factors of environmental degradation, that is, to determine the exact share of sanctions in the entire degradation process.

Although sanctions can impact the environment through restrictions on access to technology, when analyzing the impact of sanctions, one should not lose sight of other important variables, coincidences and circumstances that may play a role in environmental degradation, such as the level of foresight in strategic planning (often extremely low), quality of governance, institutional strength and natural climate variability. Sanctions reduce incomes, imports and access to technology, thereby increasing the economy's dependence on natural resources and degrading the environment.

The structure of a resource-producing country's economy means that economic growth is largely dependent on this sector. Natural resource extraction contributes to economic growth by expanding opportunities to extract natural resources and create new jobs. Economic growth and employment opportunities dependent on natural resources are constantly increasing due to increasing pressure on natural resources and environmental degradation. When an economy grows, its ability to diversify economically increases. As economic growth and economic diversification continue, societies are innovating and improving production efficiency, including by implementing BAT and changing production methods and technologies. Thanks to improved methods of producing goods and services and resulting increased efficiency, producing the same level of output requires fewer natural resources, reducing natural resource extraction and environmental stress.

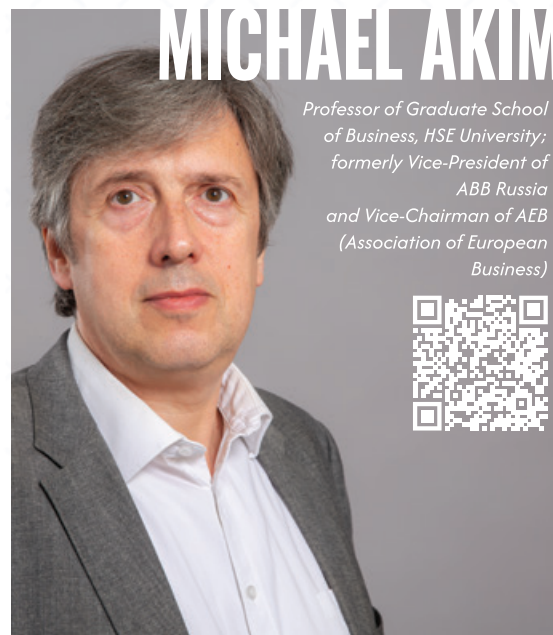
Under sanctions and embargoes, even when import opportunities and the necessary funds to purchase raw materials, components and equipment exist, barriers to the transfer of funds through formal banking systems and trade sanctions limit and reduce opportunities for the acquisition and import of goods, services and technologies, including BAT; which, on the one hand, can increase unemployment, on the other hand, stimulates the need for domestic production. By increasing trade inefficiencies, sanctions also change the cost of goods and services, thereby reduc-

ing purchasing power and limiting economic growth in the sanctioned economy. Declining economic growth and rising unemployment cause reductions in environmental budgets, reduce environmental activity and reduce the ability of the sanctioned country to protect the environment, leading to increased environmental degradation.

For example, consider the energy sector. The growth of the energy sector involves the use of water and land and increases the pressure on natural resources due to pollution and environmental damage. In conditions of high environmental footprint from the production, transportation and processing of hydrocarbons, their most rational use becomes extremely important. For the rational use of assets, it is necessary to assess the potential and monitor their condition and optimize processes using BAT.

One common mistake is to narrow environmental problems only to climate impacts. The state of environmental degradation cannot be judged by a limited number of indicators. For example, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have often been used as an indicator of the level of environmental degradation, but this indicator does not provide a complete picture of the environmental performance of a country's industry.

The energy system is very dependent on the supply of imported machinery and equipment. The idea of total import substitution inherently contradicts global economic trends, which imply the development of broad international industrial cooperation and leads to a sharp increase in costs, both economic and natural resources. R&D support for new types of equipment that comply with BAT is now extremely necessary, but after the successful completion of research and development work, launching production can obviously be difficult due to the lack of components and expensive loans. It is necessary to understand that, obviously, without access to BAT, environmental consequences, such as contamination of soil and water bodies, may manifest themselves mainly in the sanctioned country, but the GHG (greenhouse gases) emissions into the atmosphere will spread globally.





# ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN RUSSIA AND SWITZERLAND

Russia is the country with the largest number of time zones and the largest number of sanctions against it. At the same time, Russia has a fairly stable currency and it still retains broad trade and economic ties with most countries around the world.

According to the forecast of the IMF, by the end of 2023, the Russian economy will grow by 2.2%. The estimate from the end of the year was increased compared to the estimate given in July, when it expected expansion of only 1.5%. The IMF forecast has approached the estimates of the Russian Ministry of Economic Development, which expects 2023 GDP growth of 2.8%.

Definitely the sanctions have had a significant impact on the Russian economy. But steps taken by the Government and the Central Bank of Russia made it possible to reshape the Russian economy within a fairly short period of time. The Russian economy was not destroyed, despite the goals set by anti-Russian forces. The Russian economy was refocused on other markets favorable for international trade and built up new logistics routes to different parts of the world. As a result, new opportunities and incentives have emerged to develop an economy that has complete technological, industrial, demographic and scientific sovereignty.

It is important to point out that despite the fact that in March 2022, as a part of the Government Executive Order of the President of Russia, the Russian Government has approved a list of unfriendly foreign states and territories as a countermeasure on restrictions against Russia, where among other countries, Switzerland was mentioned, Russian entities are ready to conduct and strengthen constructive dialogues with Swiss partners who are positively disposed to cooperation with our country.

There are neither restrictions nor prohibitions against Swiss entities beginning or conducting business in the Russian Federation.

The Trade Mission of the Russian Federation continues receiving requests from both Russian and Swiss entrepreneurs interested in cooperation. We are pleased to see pragmatism and business approach on both sides.

The Trade Mission of the Russian Federation in the Swiss Confederation regularly negotiates with key partners such as the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs of Switzerland (SECO), the Swiss Russian

Chamber of Commerce, the Joint Chamber of Commerce (JCC), the Union of Chambers of Commerce (UCC) and the Swiss Association for Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Industries SWISSMEM, in non-sanctioned areas of cooperation strictly within legal frameworks and observing all applicable provisions of both Russian and Swiss legislation.

Taking into account all the adopted packages of sanctions, the Trade Mission of the Russian Federation has defined the following main areas for possible bilateral cooperation: medicine (medical equipment and nuclear medicine) and pharmaceuticals, IT technologies (implementation of applied software for ICT and cybersecurity), agro-industrial complex (agricultural products, fertilizers, seed cakes), food industry (frozen fish, vegetables), metallurgical products (non-precious metals incl. zinc, nickel, etc.).

Currently several investment projects are being developed with the help of the Trade Mission of the Russian Federation, namely in the fields of tourism, agriculture, watchmaking, medicine and pharmaceuticals. Here we are extensively cooperating both with our core department - the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Russian Federation, and with various Russian regions, located both in the European part of the country as well as in Siberia and in the Far East.

Therefore, the Trade Mission of the Russian Federation continues providing support and promoting the development of the Russian-Swiss economic and trade relations within the justifiable legal framework and inviting all of you to collaborate.

## SERGEY AVRAMOV

*Trade Representative  
of the Russian  
Federation in  
Switzerland*

**INFO@RUSTRADE.CH**





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# **ST. PETERSBURG INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC FORUM**

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# OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS FOR SWISS COMPANIES ON THE RUSSIAN MARKET

Since February 2022, by and by western sanctions have been introduced and tightened. Interestingly, these severe sanctions have had astonishingly little effect on the Russian economy, notwithstanding the initial state of shock right after the first, tough sanctions were introduced. The Russian economy is growing; in 2023, the GDP growth is expected to be well above 2%, for 2024 expectations range from 1.2% to 2.5%. In comparison, the Eurozone economy is in stagnation, while its largest economy, Germany, seems to be in a technical recession.

After the beginning of the fighting in Ukraine in February 2022, numerous international companies have decided to leave the Russian market, especially very large enterprises. This has mostly happened under heavy public pressure and due to conceived reputation risks. In some cases, the respective sanctions against Russia had made it impossible to continue doing business. Reputation risks constitute an obvious factor but have not affected all companies equally. Generally speaking, small and medium-sized entities are less affected and, consequently, most of them have decided to keep their operations on the Russian market running if anyhow possible.

Owing to the exit of many large, multinational enterprises, in some industries a certain vacuum would arise. The market players have started to search – and mainly found – for alternatives to fill the vacuum. We live in a globalized world where most companies would find alternative suppliers and clients. To a very large extent, Chinese companies have benefited by the sanctions, despite partial technological deficits in comparison to western analogues. Western companies worry that they have been pushed out of the market for good: “If we do not supply anymore”, it is often stated, “the Chinese will supply instead of us – now and for good”. In certain cases, the exit of foreign market players has become or could still become a golden opportunity for those western – and possibly Swiss – competitors who have decided to remain on the market and are not affected by the sanctions. They may also fill a vacuum.

On the legislative side, several laws have been

introduced that limit the capacity to act of foreign companies from so-called “unfriendly countries” (among them Switzerland).

A market exit through a sale of a daughter company in Russia (often as a management buyout) must be approved by a government commission, which means going through tedious, bureaucratic processes which can take six to nine months, without knowing the outcome. Also, the sales price must be at least 50% below “market price”, and a so-called voluntary exit tax of 15% must be paid on the market price. In addition, it has been insinuated that those companies that have quit or are going to quit might not be given access to the Russian market anymore in the future, though details remain unclear.

These factors clearly reduce the attractiveness of an exit or, in certain cases, may make it factually impossible. However, in practice not all western companies are dissatisfied with these limiting measures.

Dividend payments above 10 mio. Roubles (~100,000 CHF) monthly are prohibited, unless a company is able to receive a government commission approval, similar to what is mentioned above, which implies long, bureaucratic processes and meeting certain business/investment criteria.

Double taxation treaties with “unfriendly countries” have been partially and one-sidedly suspended. These very same states have also been added to the Finance Ministry’s Black List, which effectively means these countries, among them Switzerland, have now the same status as tax havens, which has – potentially massive – negative financial consequences.

Quite some unease among foreign investors has been caused by new laws on external management, asset transfers and property blocking. These laws target, in the very first place, large international enterprises. First cases of external management have been realized.

It is important, however, to understand that these laws have mostly – if looked at isolatedly and without any judgement – been backlashes against western sanctions efforts.

Should the EU and Switzerland take decisions to



expropriate and/or exploit assets from Russian entities or physical persons that are currently blocked – actions that would be utterly questionable from a rule of law perspective – it shall be expected that there is going to be a swift and harsh reaction from the Russian side. The legal basis for such reactions has been laid with the above-mentioned laws.

Despite the fact that certain steps taken by the Russian government, in the face of the challenging environment, in most cases – if looked at isolatedly and without going into deeper reasoning – may be coherent, it is still important to ease life of the remaining foreign businesses on the Russian market rather than to add even more to the already existing burdens to continuing doing business. It is in the interest of the Russian Federation to have an attractive investment climate. The long-term signaling effect to investors must not be disregarded. Positive signals are important to keep foreign businesses on the Russian market in the long run. It becomes even more important looking into the future, after the current conflicts, when in calmer times the focus will again turn to attracting foreign – and among them Swiss – investors.

## ANDREAS BITZI



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*Founder, Quality Partners & Legal Solutions Partners*

*Board member & Russian Chapter Chair at JCC*

*Board member German-Russian Chamber of Commerce (AHK)*

*Chairman of SME Committee at Association of European Businesses (AEB)*

*Chairman of Compliance Committee at AHK*





# SPECIAL ECONOMIC MEASURES IN RUSSIA: RESTRICTIONS AND BANS ON TRANSACTIONS WITH FOREIGNERS

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Russia's legal landscape has become dominated by so-called special economic measures (SEMs), which aim to mitigate the negative effect of Western sanctions and regulate capital outflow from the country.

These include bans or restrictions on certain transactions and operations, obtaining special permits, use of special accounts, sale of foreign currency proceeds, limits and specifics of fulfillment of certain obligations.

In general, these SEMs affect currency operations of Russian residents and deals involving foreign persons from so-called "unfriendly" states. By the order of the Russian Government these states include: European Union member states, Switzerland, the USA, the United Kingdom, Japan and 18 other countries.

The restrictions and prohibitions mainly concern deals with real estate, securities, loans and credits, shares in Russian companies, and payments of dividends abroad. Such operations must be authorized by the Central Bank of the Russian Federation, the Russian Ministry of Finance or a subcommittee of the Government Commission for the Control of Foreign Investments (the Government Commission). A special procedure applies to the reduction of authorized capitals and liquidation of Russian legal entities with foreign participation, as well as within the framework of bankruptcy proceedings.

Notably, Russian subsidiaries of companies from "unfriendly" states are also considered as persons of "unfriendly" states, so transactions between Russian residents and such subsidiaries are subject to these guidelines, unless otherwise expressly established by a relevant decree of the Russian President and other clarifications or decisions of competent authorities.

## LOANS AND CREDITS

In particular, Russian companies and individuals must obtain permission from the Government Commission to issue loans in any currency to persons from

"unfriendly" states. The exception is when loans are made in rubles to foreign individuals secured by a mortgage, or the loan is made not to a foreign person but to its subsidiary in Russia.

Repayments of loans or payments of interest to foreign lenders require the permission of the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation in coordination with the Central Bank, if amounts exceeds 10 million rubles per calendar month in aggregate with other payments or the equivalent in foreign currency at the exchange rate of the Russian Central Bank as of the 1st day of each month.

## REAL ESTATE

Real estate transactions between Russian residents and persons from "unfriendly" states are subject to approval by the Government Commission. But even here there are exceptions: if real estate is located abroad, or Russian real estate is alienated by foreign persons free of charge, or foreign persons acquire real estate, or settlements are made through special accounts in Russia, or real estate is sold at bankruptcy auctions in Russia, etc. In the above cases, it is not required to obtain permission for the transaction.

The first court cases have already appeared relating to transactions concluded without obtaining special permission. These are mainly lawsuits against Rosreestr demanding registration of the transaction and the transfer of rights to real estate. In such cases, the courts consider whether the transaction falls within exceptions where permission is not required. If there is no exception, such a transaction is void.

## SALE OF INTERESTS/SHARES

In order to sell interests or shares in Russian companies, foreign owners from "unfriendly" states must also obtain permission from the Government Commission. The current criteria were established by a decision of the Sub-Commission in July and September this year. These are the report on the market valuation of the share, confirmed by a special self-regulatory organization (SRO) (both, the apprais-

er and SRO must be from a list approved by the Russian Ministry of Finance). When determining the price, the seller must provide a discount of at least 50% of the market valuation of the share. The buyer, in its turn, must provide KPI indicators for the preservation of technological potential of the target company and the main type of economic activity, preservation of jobs and fulfillment of obligations under contracts. Settlements for the share are made through special accounts in Russia. If the seller wishes to receive money into foreign accounts, payments must be made in installments. Recently, the contribution to the budget, which one of the parties pays after the conclusion of the transaction (the so-called "exit tax"), has been increased. Previously, it amounted to 5% to 10% of the market value of the interest/shares, now it is no less than 15%. The term of payment has been reduced from 3 to 1 month.

## PAYMENT OF DIVIDENDS FROM RUSSIA TO FOREIGN COUNTRIES

Payment of dividends to shareholders of Russian companies from foreign "unfriendly" states within the limit of 10 million rubles per month (or in foreign currency in the respective equivalent) is carried out without special permits.

If the threshold of 10 million rubles per month is exceeded, one of three possible options can be chosen:

1. Payment of dividends in rubles to a special "C"-type account opened in the name of a foreign shareholder in a Russian bank without obtaining permissions.
2. Payment of dividends in foreign currency to a foreign bank account of a foreign shareholder with the permission of the Government Commission, which can be issued only under a number of conditions. In particular, the amount of dividends must not exceed 50% of the net profit for the previous year, and dividends are only paid quarterly and subject to the achievement of agreed financial and other indicators (KPIs). Such factors as dividend payments for previous periods, the willingness of the foreign shareholder to continue commercial activities in the Russian Federation, the significance of the Russian company's activities and its impact on the Russian economy, and the achievement of KPIs confirmed by the supervising ministry are taken into account.
3. In the middle of 2023, an additional opportunity to obtain permission to pay dividends in currency to a foreign bank account of a foreign shareholder in a simplified procedure appeared. It's

possible if after April 1, 2024 the foreign shareholder has made investments in the Russian economy, including expansion of production volume, development of new technologies. The amount of dividends should not exceed the amount of investments.

## COURTS INVOLVING FOREIGN PERSONS

Due to the Western sanctions, Russian companies can file a lawsuit in Russia even if foreign arbitration is agreed upon in a foreign trade contract. Additions to the Arbitration Procedure Code (APC) of the Russian Federation (Art. 248.1) allowed Russian plaintiffs to seek resolution of a dispute in a Russian court or to declare an injunction to initiate or continue proceedings in a foreign court or international commercial arbitration located abroad. The courts believe that any Russian person may invoke this article, regardless of whether they are under personal Western sanctions since all Russian persons are affected by Western restrictions. For instance, they're bound to pay the registration fees, cross borders, obtain visas and the assistance of foreign counsel, etc.

It is also important to note that due to additions to Article 52 of the Russian APC, prosecutors have been granted the right to challenge in court transactions that are concluded in violation of special economic measures.

## MARINA YANKOVSKAYA

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- The altitude of over 950m. The vicinity of the National Park Biogradska Gora, the UNESCO World Network of Biosphere Reserves, considered a premium tourist attraction, and Tara River, the natural wonders of Europe's deepest canyon.
- The distance from the Adriatic coastline is approximately 100km, where one can enjoy amazing luxury hotels and harbor, but also historical sights.
- Kolasin is one of the centers of Montenegro's mountain tourism with 45 kilometers of ski slopes. The highway enables visitors to reach the ski center Kolasin in half an hour from the Capital of Podgorica, or 45 minutes from Podgorica Airport with regular flights to major European destinations. The traditional Kolasin Ski resort is the most popular for both corporate and family, skiing, and summer holidays.
- The climate on the coast is Mediterranean with 240 sunny days. The average summer temperature is 27C while in winter it is 8C. The mountainous north of the country has an alpine climate with substantial snowfall in the winter.
- Montenegro is the candidate for the upcoming EU accession, therefore investors expect an active growth trend in real estate prices.
- Taxes are relatively low in comparison to other European countries.







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# SUSPENSION OF SOME DOUBLE TAXATION RULES IN RUSSIA

In August 2023, certain provisions of international agreements on the avoidance of double taxation were suspended in Russia<sup>1</sup>. These agreements between the Russian Federation and 38 states, which were reached between 1992 and 2017, allowed foreign companies to pay reduced taxes on passive income from Russian sources (and vice versa – Russian companies with passive income from sources in other countries). In the absence of such agreements, the tax burden increases significantly.

***In this article, we consider some of the possible consequences of these changes, and, in particular, their possible impact on Russian-Swiss business relations and investment climate. Among the above-mentioned international treaties, Russia unilaterally suspended some articles of a similar agreement between the Russian Federation and the Swiss Confederation.***

Among the consequences of the suspension of the

agreement are the following:

- For foreign companies and individuals receiving passive income paid from the Russian Federation, the tax burden increases significantly.
- The provisions on the application of reduced withholding tax rates for the payment of various types of income from Russia (income from capital, passive income-dividends, interest, royalties, income from international transportation, professional income, etc.) are suspended. Such income will be subject to the rates provided for by the Tax Code of the Russian Federation.

For example, the tax rates for calculating the tax on dividends will increase from 5-10% to 15%, and for calculating the tax on royalties, the interest rate will be 20%. Also, the tax on income from the sale of real estate located in Russia will be calculated at a rate of 20%.

## EXAMPLE

As an example of an increase in the tax burden for a business, the following situation can be considered.

Let's imagine that a Swiss company (licensor), on the basis of an agreement dated 2021, granted a non-exclusive license to a Russian organization for the right to use a television recording. The Russian licensee was paying the corresponding payments to the licensor.

The Swiss company received income from sources in the Russian Federation without operating through a permanent representative office there. In this case, in accordance with the tax legislation of Russia, the licensee (Russian company) must act as a tax agent of the Swiss licensor, that is, withhold and transfer taxes to the state budget of Russia<sup>2</sup>.

The Government of the Russian Federation and the Swiss Confederation signed an Agreement dated 11/15/1995 on the avoidance of double taxation with respect to taxes on income and capital (hereinafter referred to as the "Agreement"). In accordance with paragraph 1 of Article 12 of the Agreement, income from copyrights and licenses arising in one Contracting State and paid to a resident of the other Contracting State should be taxed only in the State

whose resident is the actual owner of income from copyrights and licenses. That is, in this case, taxes had to be paid by a Swiss company in Switzerland.

In connection with the adoption of Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 585 dated 08.08.2023 "On the Suspension by the Russian Federation of Certain Provisions of International Treaties of the Russian Federation on taxation" (hereinafter referred to as the "Decree"), the operation of the aforementioned Article 12 of the Agreement was suspended from August 8, 2023.

From that moment onwards, the taxation of income received by Swiss residents from sources in the Russian Federation is carried out in accordance with the provisions of the legislation on taxes and duties of the Russian Federation. And the Russian organization, when paying payments to the resident of the Swiss Confederation for the right to use an object of intellectual property (TV recordings), is a tax agent for income tax.

Starting from 08/08/2023, the Russian licensee must calculate and withhold income tax when paying income, in order to then transfer the withheld amounts to the Russian state. The income tax rate in

1 - Initially, the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, No. 585 dated 08.08.2023 "On the Suspension by the Russian Federation of Certain Provisions of International Treaties of the Russian Federation on taxation" was adopted. Herewith, at the end of the year the Federal Law No. 598-FZ dated 19.12.2023 "On the Suspension by the Russian Federation of Certain Provisions of International Tax Treaties with the Russian Federation" was adopted (entered into force on 30.12.2023), which de facto repeated verbatim the text of the Decree mentioned above.

2 - Articles 24, 309 of the Tax Code of the Russian Federation.

this case is 20%<sup>3</sup>. Prior to the entry into force of the Decree, the Swiss company was only required to pay taxes in Switzerland on its own in accordance with applicable Swiss law.

Moreover, if a Russian organization now has to pay to

a foreign partner such a debt that arose before August 8, 2023, it must in any case withhold the amount of tax and pay it to the Russian state, since the corresponding tax obligations arise upon payment of remuneration, and not upon its accrual.

Similarly, the changes will affect the payments of income from real estate<sup>4</sup>, dividends<sup>5</sup>, and interest<sup>6</sup>.

For foreign companies with permanent representative offices in Russia, taxation of income will in fact remain the same, as the Tax Code of the Russian Federation provides for rules similar to the suspended provisions of most double tax treaties ("permanent establishment", "profit from commercial activities").

As regards Russian individuals and organisations that have passive income from sources in states whose treaties are affected by the said suspension, such income will be taxed under the previously effective rules until such a state (e.g. Swiss Confederation) reciprocally suspends the double taxation treaty. In the event of a reciprocal suspension by the relevant state, the income will be subject to taxation at the national rates of these states without the possibility of applying the currently existing exemptions.

At the same time, it is important to note that some essential provisions of double taxation treaties have remained in force. In particular, these changes do not affect the rules on persons and taxes to which the agreement applies, as well as on the elimination of double taxation. And since regulation on the elimination of double taxation (offset) has not been suspended, the right to offset the tax paid in another state remains with the legal entities.

However, in any case, these legislative changes significantly worsen the business climate, increase the burden associated with administration (it is obvious that companies will have to make additional efforts in order to prove the mentioned entitlement to offset), and reduce business profitability.

With respect to the retention of the right of offset for Russian individuals, there are differing opinions on this issue. According to Russian tax legislation<sup>7</sup>, such an offset is possible only if there is a double tax treaty. And if we consider the suspension of the provisions of the agreement as its "absence" at this particular moment, then the opinion that individuals are deprived of the right to offset foreign taxes against personal income tax in respect of income received after 08.08.2023 (the date of entry into force of these changes) is legitimate.

But there is another opinion - since the rules on the

elimination of double taxation remain in force, an offset is still possible.

At the same time, the possibility of offsetting taxes paid in the Russian Federation in foreign countries depends on the legislation of a foreign state. In this regard, the suspension of the provisions of agreements on the avoidance of double taxation of income may create potential difficulties in the exercise of the right of foreign companies to offset in their countries.

Now the «initiative» is on the side of the states with which Russia has concluded relevant agreements. For example, at the time of writing, Switzerland has not yet retaliated or suspended the provisions of the Double Taxation Agreement on Income and Capital Taxes of 15 November 1995 with the Russian Federation. However, the likelihood of such a decision is very high and it is therefore necessary to monitor relevant developments.

And if the right to suspend their validity is exercised, the consequences will be an increase in the tax burden for all persons receiving income from abroad. In the worst case scenario, the same income will be taxed twice: both in Russia and in the foreign country.

**Editor's note:**

The Double Tax Treaty stipulates in Art. 28 that termination is only possible with a notice period of 6 months at the end of each year - a "suspension" is simply invalid. On the other hand, Article 24 stipulates that Russians in Switzerland must be treated the same as Swiss investors in Russia - so this year the Federal Tax Administration will increase the tax burden for Russian investors in Switzerland to the same extent as Russia does it for Swiss investments in Russia. This measure by Switzerland was also confirmed to our editor by the FTA.



3 - Paragraph 1 of Article 310, paragraph 1, paragraph 2 of Article 284 of the Tax Code of the Russian Federation.

4 - Article 6 of the Agreement dated 11/15/1995 between the Russian Federation and the Swiss Confederation.

5 - Article 10 of the Agreement

6 - Article 11 of the Agreement

7 - Article 232 of the Tax Code of the Russian Federation



# STUDYING IN SWITZERLAND AS A FOREIGNER EXPECTATIONS VERSUS REALITY

As I was given the honor to write an article in the Annual Report for 2023 issued by the "Swiss-Russian Chamber of Commerce", I struggled to choose only one topic to focus on, as Swiss Immigration is such a complex and interesting field. In the end, I decided to focus on the future – and the future lies with the generation who may be at this very moment considering which path to take in terms of their future education.

That being said, Switzerland might not be the first country that comes to mind when you think about studying abroad. The country is not only known for good chocolate, delicious cheese, and excellent watches but also for having some of the world's best universities. Switzerland offers over 3,000 degree programmes, and 700 of these are taught in English, so you don't need to worry about learning any local languages. Compared to other countries like the USA or the UK, the tuition in Switzerland will not leave you in debt. The fees of each university can vary and are decided by the responsible canton; however, they generally range from 800 to 1,500 CHF per semester. You do, however, need to consider the cost of living in all of this, but that is another topic altogether.

Most universities will support their future students in obtaining the proper permits to be able to live and study in Switzerland either directly or via organisations like AIESEC. I will not go into the details on the application process, as it varies from university to university, but essentially, after receiving an acceptance letter from a Swiss university as a national of a third-country (this includes Russian nationals), you will need to apply for a visa with the Swiss embassy or consulate in your country of residence before being able to travel to Switzerland and registering there. A student permit will then be issued after registration and completion of a biometric analysis in Switzerland.

Starting at 6 months after beginning your studies as an international student, you may work up to 15 hours per week during the semester and even full-time during semester breaks. However, it is the employer's responsibility to be informed about the process and apply for the proper work authorisation with the competent authorities, which must be

approved before any work can commence. Many university programmes also include a mandatory internship as part of the programme of study. In such cases, once you have an internship contract, the employer must also apply for a work authorisation, which if approved, would allow you to work full-time for the duration of the internship. However, there are some conditions which need to be fulfilled: the work cannot last more than half of the total duration of your studies, and salary and working conditions must meet legal requirements.

Most graduates from Swiss universities want to look for a job and remain in the country. However, it is important to mention that third-country nationals fall under the usual requirements of the Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration, which regulates the admission to the Swiss labour market and stipulates that a labour market test must be conducted by a Swiss employer before they are able to hire third-country nationals for vacant positions. It is important to mention that the Swiss authorities do not distinguish between nationalities and treat every third-country national (including Russian nationals) equally.

Having said that, in October of 2022, a proposal was put forward for holders of a master's degree or doctorate in a field where there is a proven shortage of skilled workers to be able to stay and work in Switzerland, even if they come from a third country; this is a select, small group of people, as the law only applies to persons whose activity is of scientific or economic interest. According to the Federal Department of Justice and Police, the Swiss Parliament is currently demanding to make an exception to the quotas for workers from countries outside the European Union and the European Free Trade Association, with the motion "if Switzerland trains expensive specialists, they should also be able to work here".

The motion is still being discussed at the federal level and has not yet been approved. Still, it is important to understand that like everything else in Switzerland, different cantons will apply this rule at their own discretion, which means that this may still vary significantly canton by canton, and there will not be a unified approach in this sense.

For the time being, there is already an exemption in the law that allows a potential waiver from the labour market testing requirements for third-country nationals graduating from recognised Swiss universities, but there are two major conditions in addition to the other applicable requirements:

- the work involved is of high academic interest, e.g., in research and development or in the application of new technologies, or
- the work involved is of high economic interest, e.g., it contributes to the creation of new jobs, or it generates new orders and contracts for the Swiss economy.

For all other categories of third-country graduates, upon successful completion of studies at a Swiss university, they may apply for a 6-month short-term residence permit with the aim of looking for a job in the country.

We are hopeful that the previously discussed motion will be approved by the Swiss authorities and will thus open new opportunities for young talents from third countries to remain in Switzerland after completing their studies there.

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# HOW TO ADAPT TO LIFE IN SWITZERLAND

On the streets of Swiss cities, one can hear the languages of almost all the peoples of the world. Of course, the ears of newly arrived Russophones automatically hone in upon the ever more frequently heard Russian.

These Russian-speaking people are present in Switzerland for various reasons. But most of us have a common desire - to "find ourselves" in a new place as quickly as possible. No matter how theoretically wonderful Switzerland may be, it still may not be so easy to assimilate in this society - which on the one hand, is quite friendly, but on the other hand, is quite conservative.

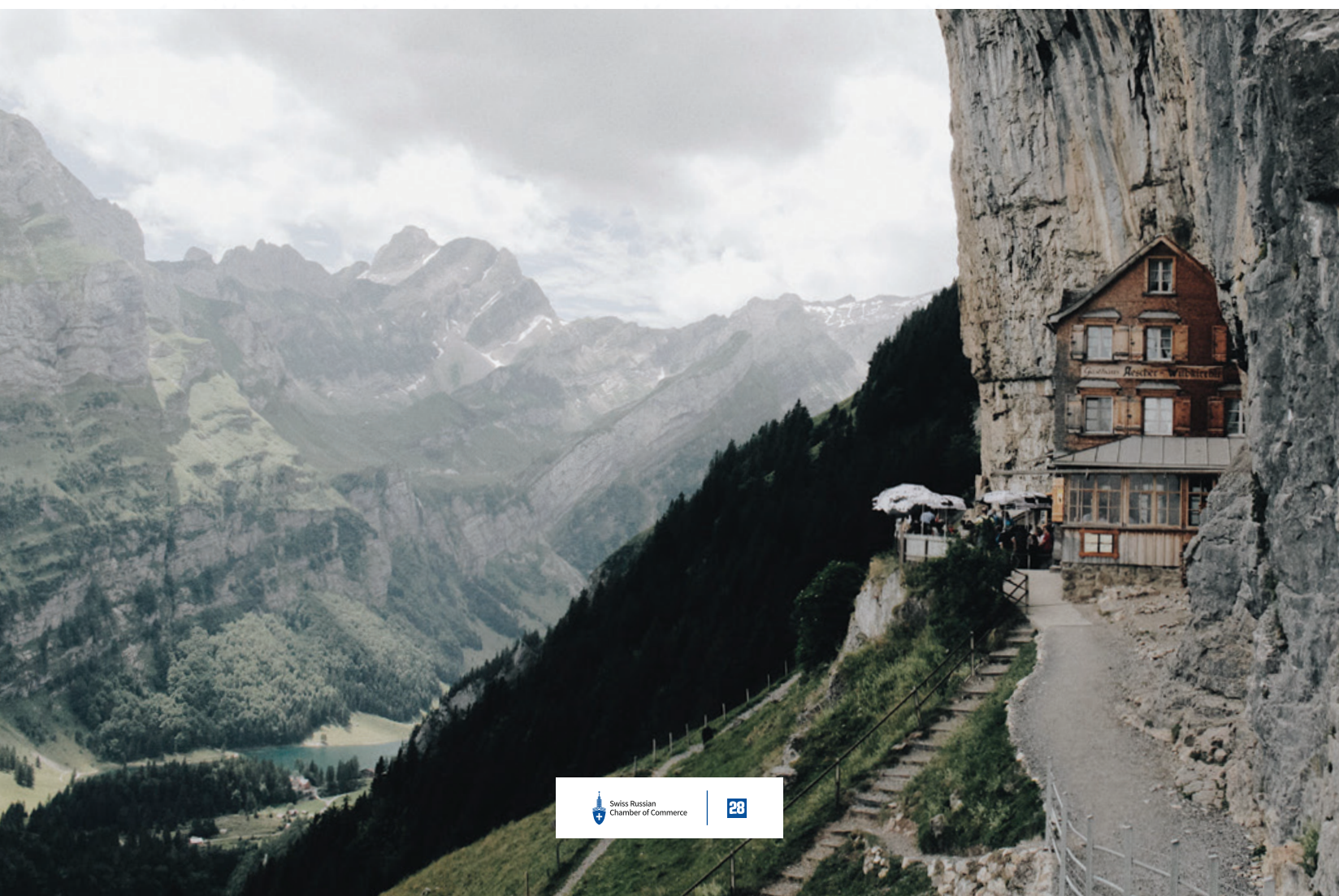
There are of course general recommendations on adaptation to life in a new country: e.g. studying the local language, culture and traditions, joining local clubs, participation in various events. But they remind me of a famous meme from the Internet: "It is better to be healthy and rich than poor and sick."

In the spring of 2022, I arrived with my family in

Zurich. It helped a lot that our relatives already lived here, so from the very beginning we were not lonely. Nevertheless, we needed to find our own social life, and I can share some pointers based on my own experience.

## LANGUAGE AND ICEBREAKERS

No matter how trite it may sound, knowledge of the German language even at the household level is helpful. It is very important that the Swiss are very tolerant of newcomers who speak imperfectly in German. New interlocutors are even encouraged. If I try to say something in German, I usually start with the phrase "Ich spreche kaum Deutsch", which immediately cancels any expectations from the native. And if after that I manage to say several phrases without errors, we may assume that the contact has already been established.





# EMPLOYMENT

As part of this essay, it is impossible to fully detail the search for work and work permits. I will briefly share the less conventional ideas.

In addition to the usual search for vacancies on public sites and blind distribution of your resume, you can do the following:

- Think about what you can do besides your main profession. Have you participated in conferences or conducted training? In Switzerland there are private schools<sup>1</sup> where your knowledge and skills can be useful: try to contact them.
- While looking for work in Switzerland, you can continue to work remotely for your previous employers or customers. In addition to financial support, this will relieve you of idleness, even if it is forced, and keep your skills sharp.
- Place your resume on sites looking for childcare<sup>2</sup>. Why not? If you have a driver's license, you can take children to school. And in the beginning, no new contacts are negligible. It's maybe hard to believe, but it's exactly that which helped me find my first job in my profession in Switzerland - the mother whose child I drove to hockey classes invited me to join their company.
- Subscribe to the news of interesting companies on LinkedIn. If suitable vacancies appear there, you will be informed. Plus, companies hold open seminars where you can get acquainted with their HR-staff.
- Look for networking opportunities.

In addition to business seminars, networking can mean participation in festivals, professional exhibitions or conferences. Use these opportunities, do not be afraid to ask questions. This helps to stand out from the masses. And after the event, you can approach the person of interest and say: "During the event I asked you a question; please let me clarify... "

One person shared such a "life hack": find a single word that characterizes you from a professional point of view. For me, as a lawyer, it might be the word "contracts", because I am really specialized in this topic. In situations of "quick acquaintances", this can help briefly introduce yourself to interlocutors and increase your memorability.

# HOBBIES

The advice "get involved in the Community" is actually one of the most worthwhile. In Switzerland, you can find associates in almost any business, from sports to pub quizzes and trivia contests<sup>3</sup>. Common interests forge not only new friendships, but also - with a successful combination of circumstances - even new employment opportunities.

My examples might be considered quite ordinary, but here and there there are a couple of interesting points.

I am a football fan. As soon as I realized that our family would stay in Switzerland for a while, I wrote to three football teams for members 40 years and older, asking "may I come to training?". One team agreed, and after a couple of workouts I was offered a permanent place on the team. And a little while later I was able to participate in the official championship of the Canton of Zurich.



1 - For example, here you can find information about Russian private schools: <https://aboutswiss.ch/russian-switzerland/russkie-shkoly-v-shveytsarii/>

2 - For example, <https://babysitting24.ch/en>

3 - To the enthusiasts of the game "Chto? Gde? Kogda?"/ "What? Where? When?"/ in Zurich, you can join the Telegram group <https://t.me/+ZGvPekUVQOg1N2Ey>



In order to more quickly assimilate, I noted the photos and names of the players from the team's website. I memorized all of them and after a couple of weeks could call each of them by name. This played an even larger role than when I began to occasionally go out for a beer with a team. This was also very important, even if almost no one on the team speaks English, nor did I speak German at all at that time.

## VOLUNTEERING

This has turned out to be a very important part of life in Switzerland. Imagine: in the country there are about 60,000 km of hiking trails and most of them are kept clean and orderly by volunteers.

If you can help someone, help. That's right, in general. Plus, this will help you get acquainted with interesting, curious, open people. Finally, the Swiss are very appreciative when people find the opportunity to contribute to the welfare of society.

For example, having proposed my help to the Swiss-Russian Chamber of Commerce, I met many wonderful people. Some acquaintances turned out to be very useful: one of the members of the chamber helped me join the HWZ curriculum, another revealed a lot of useful things about Masters studies at the University of Zurich, where I am currently studying. And with yet another contact (with whom we are now family friends) I work on my English weekly...

If you like sports, check out the non-profit organization SPORTEGRATION<sup>4</sup>, which organizes sports classes for refugees from around the world. They did



not have any openings for me to conduct football training. However, two guys from Germany and I have been training a beach volleyball team for two seasons. Such opportunities can be found in any field - education, healthcare, etc<sup>5</sup>.

However open we are to the world, adaptation can take time. Be patient and do not be afraid to try new things. And if you have your own ideas about how to quickly adapt to this wonderful country, inform newcomers - for example, at regular get-togethers of the Swiss-Russian Chamber of Commerce.

Information does not decrease if it is shared. In fact, we mutually enrich each other by keeping exchanges open and frequent.

4 - <https://sportegration.ch/>

5 - Options for the application of forces can be viewed on the websites <https://www.unv.org/>, <https://www.zharity.ch/>. In addition, the place where you live probably also has such opportunities. At the annual fairs, there is usually a tent in each area where you can sign up as a volunteer. Feel free to offer your help.

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# LET'S VISIT THE NEIGHBORS!

## TRAVELING IN RUSSIA IS COMFORTABLE, SAFE AND INTERESTING FOR FOREIGNERS.

I started learning Russian at the beginning of 2018, six months before I traveled on the Trans-Siberian railway. I started learning, became a fan and finished my first certificate A1 in October 2018.

Russia has 11 time zones, 2 oceanic coasts, 14 neighboring countries, 128000 km of railway and only one necessary visa. Russia had also, however, rather relaxed entry rules for foreign tourists during the pandemic. If you had a visa and a fresh PCR test then you could theoretically easily enter Russia. Once inside Russia, you could travel unhindered for thousands of kilometers in the largest country in the world. The vast geography is spanned by an active passenger railway network, which is very appealing for residents of countries smaller than Moscow oblast.

## BAM PART I/II: BY TRAIN ALMOST TO ALASKA

The New and Old Worlds come closest at the Bering Strait. Eleven thousand years ago, the Strait was dry land, across which the ancestors of the native peoples of the Americas arrived from Eurasia. The restoration of a land link across the Bering Strait has been discussed for centuries.

The Russian rail network comes within 3000 km of the Strait. The two Russia railheads closest to the Bering Strait both deserved a visit:

Vanino, 3500 km from the Bering Strait, hosts the ferry to Sakhalin island, which forms a ligament between Russia and Japan. The Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) connected Vanino in 1991.

Nizhny Bestyakh, 3000 km from the Bering Strait, is the railway terminus closest to the coldest regional capital in the world, Yakutsk.

Today, Vanino and Nizhny Bestyakh are important endpoints of the Eurasian railway network. Soon, however, they will become intermediate stations on the high-speed railway linking the entire world.

# WILLIAM ANDERSON



*Rolling stock certification and authorization engineer, after-hours linguist and songwriter.  
Fribourg, Switzerland*

*Novaya Chara, Chara Sands, August 2023*

In Vanino I met an employee of the train station security, Victor Vasilievich, who packed me into his own car and showed me his beloved hometown, including historical and cultural landmarks. I remain very grateful to him for his spontaneous generosity and kindness.

On board the Baikal Amur Magistral I stopped in Komsomolsk-na-Amure and in Tynda.

In Tynda I changed trains for the new line north to Yakutia. The staff on board the northbound Amur-Yakutsk Mainline included steward Alexander, who told me unique stories about the train circulating between the Chinese border (Blagoveshchensk) and the northeasternmost station in Eurasia. In Nizhniy Bestyakh, he showed me the terminus station and the rails which, one day, will lead to Alaska. This was very important for me, for which I remain grateful.

I arrived in Nizhny Bestyakh 10 days and 2900km after Vanino.

## SOUTHERN RUSSIA: EVERY TIME IS THE LAST TIME EVER

The year 2022 inspired me to diversify my destinations. The pandemic was over, but new stupidities seemed to threaten my travel appetite. This time I would visit neither the far east nor the big European cities. Every time is the last time ever. I asked my most trustworthy travel agent, a two-dimensional map, and decided it was time to touch the Seas of Azov and Caspian. I linked them with the land yachts of the Eurasian steppe, the Platzkart wagons of the RZD.

I asked for a single-entry visa for one month. I received a multiple-entry visa for three years. That was the moment when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation "obliged" me to visit all possible corners of the world's largest country.

Propelled by the notion of, "this might be the last chance!", I arrived in Rostov-on-Don and hopped into a suburban train to the Sea of Azov. At the beach I met Pyotr, who invited me to his new dacha for tea and with whom I played guitar. Pyotr then drove me back from Merzhanovo to Rostov-on-Don. Such random kindness and generosity astonishes me every time, even though they now seem like inalienable parts of visiting Russia.

The biggest challenges on this trip were the necessity to pay cash everywhere and the difficulty of reserving hotels without credit cards. My broken fragments of Russian provoked immense hospitality in southern Russia. I also bizarrely managed to open a Sberbank account.

Of course, even some Russians warned me of

## BAM PART II/II: FROM THE SIBERIAN SAHARA TO THE INLAND SEA

I recalled that Istanbul was my new carousel to the east. So I found the longest eastbound flight from Istanbul to Russia, to Novosibirsk, and began to weave a new coherent odyssey. Ideally I would have flown to Tynda, where I left the BAM in 2021. But it was in Yakutia, Neryungri, a town on the Yakutsk Amur Magistral, which had direct flights from Novosibirsk. I booked my flights and train tickets with help from a member of the Swiss Russian Chamber of Commerce, Dmitry S.

My biggest challenges on this trip were budget and finding accommodation. After arriving in Neryungri, only the third hotel had room for me. Every negotiation about accommodation broke my confidence in



speaking & understanding Russian.

My wallet felt emptier too. Maybe Siberia, Yakutia and the far east are more expensive than the south of Russia. Maybe 2023 was generally more expensive than 2022. Maybe both. I carefully survived, but when I left I had 3000₽ remaining.

I was lucky in many ways. I found a place to sleep after 2 refusals. I could exchange cash Euros for Rubles. I could buy a local sim-card.

Buying a local sim-card was a nice anecdote. A very popular request from me in Russia is for my patronymic name (ОТЧЕСТВО in Russian). I have no official assigned patronymic, so I always answer, honestly, that I have no patronymic name. My documents have no such name. At the Megaphone shop in Neryungri the clerk did not believe me. A long line of shoppers formed behind me. An emotional man came to me from the line and proclaimed "You Must have a patronymic name! Only Musulmans (sic.) have no patronymic name, and you sir are no Musulman!". The clerk then informed the entire line that: "He is not Musulman, he is American!".

What could you possibly want to visit between Neryungri and Novosibirsk? It's another popular question, and not only from the immigration police at Novosibirsk airport.





*With steward Alexander and his colleague, Nizhniy Bestyakh, June 2021*

In Siberia there are endless pineforests, mountains, and also a sandy desert in Novaya Chara, not far from the BAM. I found a guide, Vladimir, who also organized an apartment for me. The approach by foot through melted permafrost (in Russian referred to as "mari") was the hardest part of any of my travels in Russia. We nourished all the mosquitoes of the entire country. Finally, the Siberian Sahara appeared. We spent an afternoon there, making a fire, making tea, and eating a picnic.

Between Neryungri and Novosibirsk there is also the biggest volume of non-polar freshwater on the planet. My second-ever visit to Baikal took me to the north of the lake. There, I finally met other tourists, all Siberians, who "only traveled 12 hours" to stay one week near Baikal.

When traveling I like to plan in increments of two days, and leave smaller increments unplanned. You will always find better plans after you arrive! I arrived in Severobaikalsk with the vague desire to take a boat. So, at my inn I asked the owner where I could find an excursion on the lake. He replied with a word so strange that it could have been Japanese: Ha-Ku-Sy. With that word I asked the internet for details and found an outdated timetable for boat trips to Ha-Ku-Sy from the harbor. The next morning, I took my new vocabulary for a walk to the harbor. I asked all passers-by: "where is the excursion to Ha-Ku-Sy?" I asked, and asked and asked, until finally a man arrived who offered to drive me to a ticket office. There, I bought a ticket to Ha-Ku-Sy for the next day. Ha-Ku-Sy is a beautiful lakeside resort with hot springs and no road connection. If I had planned too precisely I would have never accidentally discovered Ha-Ku-Sy. Never banish happy accidents from your free time!

I passed Taishet, and it was there that my official

mission, to travel every meter of the BAM, was complete. Between Taishet and Novosibirsk is the town of Kemerovo. In Kemerovo lives my friend Alexander, whom I met two years earlier and who showed me the beautiful sites of Tomskaya Pisanitsa and Krasnaya Gorka. If this did not happen in Russia, I would suspect that I had hallucinated the kindness and generosity which I experienced there.

## CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

In Russia my own curiosity was always matched by that of my acquaintances. Who was the tourist? Imagining the complete exclusion of 11% of the inhabitable planet makes me feel lonely and stranded. Especially because now I can often understand the language and reply in context.

This hobby has made me discover that official sources in the west seem to be always and exactly incorrect. The neutral Swiss MFA recommends avoiding unnecessary stays in and travel to Russia. The American State Department "Russia travel advisory" is of course much more severe. I now know that their warnings are actually invitations. Arrive in rural Russia and discover how similar rural Russians and rural Americans are. Americans too would travel 12 hours to spend a few days on a lake. Maybe rural Russians are strangely familiar, while Europeans are familiarly strange. The new obligation is for each of us to go to the source to know about anything. Hearsay is mostly deception, and indirect information is mostly hearsay.



## ICEBREAKERS

Other popular questions and requests were:

What do people in Europe think about us?

Say a sentence in Swiss!

What could possibly be interesting here in \_\_\_\_ ?

All are excellent ice-breakers!

## WHY TRAVEL THERE?

Traveling in Russia is challenging and rewarding. It's also mathematically exceptional. Visiting a country which covers 11% of the land of the planet is not radical: avoiding 11% of the solid surface of the planet, however, is!

I still look forward to visiting Sakhalin, Magadan, Kolyma and Kamchatka. These regions have few trains, but there are still inhabitants, persisting far away from big cities, and therefore, travel is possible and interesting.

## THANKS

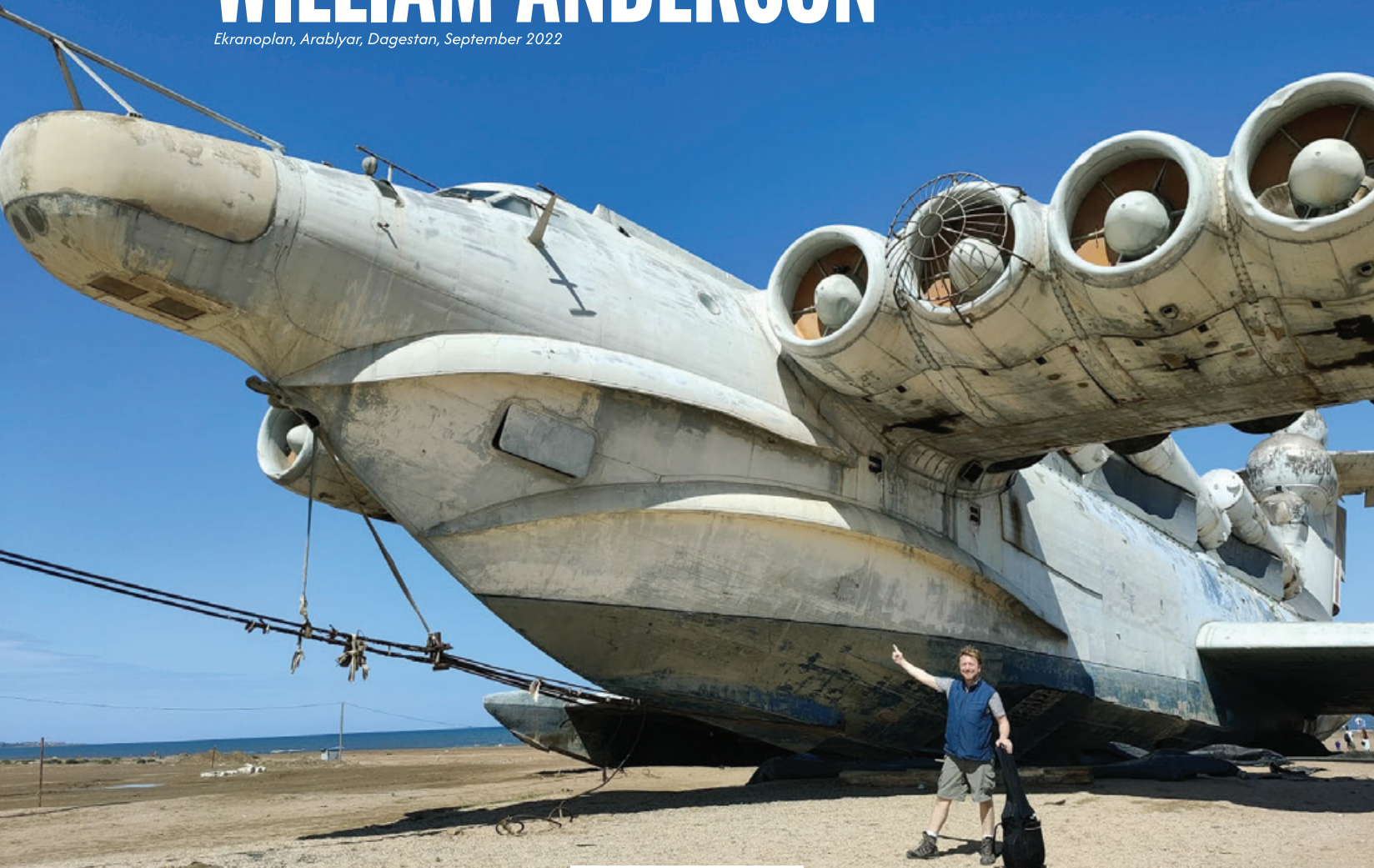
I often remind my language teachers that they do God's work, bringing together people, acting as local diplomats and working in the face of much adversity. In order of their appearance in my curriculum, I thank Evgeniya Vyacheslavovna, Irina Petrovna and Darya Olegovna, for absorbing my countless errors and synthesizing a miniature but capable Russian speaker out of a silent but motivated traveler. And I have been extremely lucky with all new acquaintances on the road.

I have also been fortunate to have become connected with the Swiss Russian Chamber of Commerce, who have introduced me with bright and interesting contacts from Switzerland and from Russia.

The more people you meet, the more friends you will have. My contacts have helped me buy tickets, rent apartments, and avoid rainfall. Just show up and speak. Our one planet remains infested with goodness.

# WILLIAM ANDERSON

*Ekranoplan, Arablyar, Dagestan, September 2022*





# SWISS QUEST – A NEW WAY TO WALK AROUND THE CITY

Do you enjoy walking around the city? I simply adore it. Wandering through my favorite streets, stopping for coffee, soaking up the atmosphere, revisiting beloved places. I love following my "signature" route with my husband and kids, family, or friends, and showing the city to guests. "Well, show us your Zurich," they say, sipping a fresh and dry Riesling Sylvaner after enjoying raclette. And you happily embark on your favorite route, as if watching a beloved movie all over again.

Curious guests ask questions about the colorful facades and street names, and in those moments, you wish to be a professional guide, but alas. Knowledge is lacking, facts get mixed up in your head. I was trying to google on the go and translate facts from Wikipedia into conversation. I wish I could have the storytelling ready for the walk. Sound familiar?

This is how the idea of Swiss Quest was born – city walks with a smartphone, where you can learn fascinating stories about buildings and fountains, inscriptions and plaques along the way. The quest includes verbal and photo navigation, which gently guides you along the right route. To add a gaming element to such a walk, some facts are encrypted into questions.

A walk in the Swiss Quest format tells stories, tests ingenuity and wit, and most importantly, allows you to combine a tour with casual conversation and snack stops. At your convenience, at your own pace, you walk around the city with a tour guide in your smartphone.

Today, we have six routes in six cities – Zurich, Geneva, Lausanne, Montreux, Bern, and Lucerne. For each city, we have chosen a theme for the tour – art, money, fountains... Telling or listening to stories is more interesting this way. We would be delighted if you try them out. Enjoy your walk!



[WWW.SWISSQUEST.ME](http://WWW.SWISSQUEST.ME)





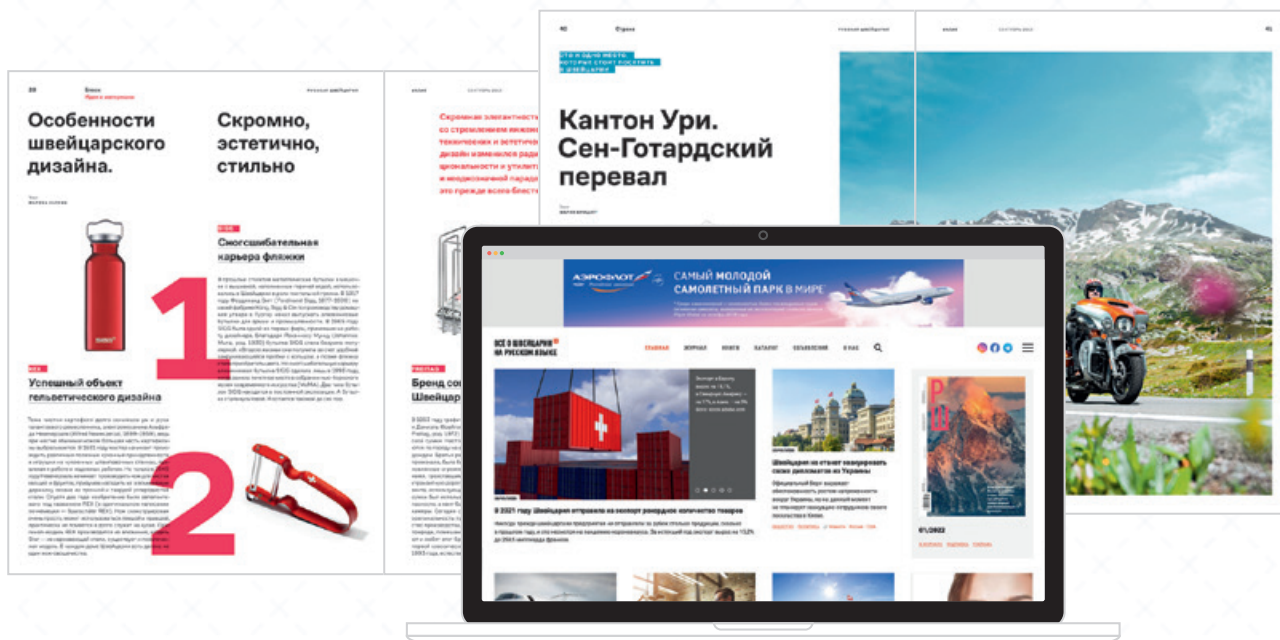


## «РШ» — популярный журнал о Швейцарии на русском языке

«РШ» – единственный регулярный и независимый печатный источник информации о Швейцарии на русском языке. «РШ» публикует материалы о политике и истории, о праве и экономике, о стиле жизни и организации отдыха, о событиях культуры и искусства. Портреты интересных людей, живущих здесь, и интервью с гостями Конфедерации являются неотъемлемой частью информационного предложения. Все тексты пишутся исключительно для нашего издания. Выбор тем и перспектива их освещения осуществляются с точки зрения русскоязычного жителя Швейцарии.

## «РШ» — the popular magazine about Switzerland in Russian

«РШ» is the only regular and independent printed source of information about Switzerland in Russian. «РШ» publishes materials on politics and history, law and economy, on the lifestyle and leisure and on culture and art events. Additionally, we publish stories and interviews of interesting residents and guests of the Confederation. All texts are written exclusively for “Russian Switzerland”. We are covering topics and events from the perspective of the Russian-speaking residents of Switzerland.



# aboutswiss.ch

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Спасибо!

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VOLUNTEERS, PARTNERS, SUPPLIERS AND TEAM FOR  
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WE APPRECIATE YOUR HELP & SUPPORT

*Svetlana Chiriaeva*

President of the Swiss Russian Chamber of Commerce



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### OUR SERVICES

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**HEALTHY AGING:** Special examinations help to identify your health weaknesses. With this knowledge, you can make the necessary lifestyle corrections to stay healthy for a long time.

## CLASSICAL TREATMENT

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- X-ray examinations with the latest digital X-ray technology
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### CENTRAL LOCATION

Our medical practice is located in the middle of the trendy district of Zurich North (Oerlikon). Only a few steps from the tram/bus station «Sternen Oerlikon» or 4 minutes walk from Zurich-Oerlikon train station.

#### FOR PATIENTS FROM ABROAD:

ST Med is located only 6 km from Zurich Airport. There are numerous hotels in the area.

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# My Media **SWISS**

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**POST-PROCESSING:** Our experienced staff is ready to help you choose the right materials and offer various types of post-processing, such as lamination, embossing, lacquering, punching, silk-screening and others, which will give your products an exclusive look.

**PACKAGING:** My Media Swiss GmbH designs and manufactures packaging - from stylish bags to creative boxes for perfumes, cosmetics, jewelry and chocolates. We also offer packaging for bottles and consumer goods.

**DESIGN:** Our design team is ready to help you create a style that will fit your company, as well as develop designs for a variety of projects. Contact us if you need a layout for any printed material, stand design, banners, packaging or labels for beverages and products.

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Our team of 3D designers will create realistic visualizations of your products meticulously crafted for versatile use, whether in print or animated formats, making them ideal for promotional purposes that demand both precision and creativity.

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PREPARED AND PUBLISHED IN FEB 2024





Swiss Russian  
Chamber of Commerce



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ANNUAL REPORT  
2024

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