



Media release

Beijing 17.04.2023

Discover art & culture of Switzerland's fourth national language kick off first edition of Romansh Language Week in China

Beijing, April 17th – Swiss Ambassador to China Jürg Burri hosted a reception tonight to officially kick off the week devoted to Switzerland's fourth national language, Romansh. It is the first ever Romansh Language Week (Emna da la lingua rumantscha) in China. With the presence of Mr. Not Vital, Romansh-region born Swiss artist, Mr. Andreas Gabriel, Secretary General of the Lia Rumantscha, the leading organization to promote Romansh, and Ms. Giuanna Carviezel, researcher on Romansh language and professional translator of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the reception gathered 100+ guests to celebrate Switzerland's linguistic and cultural diversity. This is also the first time in the past three years that the Swiss Embassy invites artists and guests from Switzerland to China for cultural events.

The thematic week includes a Romansh language & culture dialogue by Not Vital and Andreas Gabriel, lectures at Beijing Foreign Studies University on Romansh language & culture, its history, development and preservation and the role of art in protecting minority language & culture, dialogues of Not Vital at Academy of Art and Design, Tsinghua University as well as his visit together with Giuanna Carviezel to Chengdu for lectures on minority language and culture preservation. In addition, Giuanna Carviezel will make a visit to Swiss School Beijing and read a story in Romansh for the children. There's also a Romansh crash-course video series and other digital content to be launched on social media. The aim is to showcase Switzerland's multilingual culture in China.

Ambassador Burri said in his opening remarks that multilingualism is part of the Swiss DNA and contributes to Switzerland's cultural diversity. 'In addition to our annual Italian, French and German language weeks, I am happy to see the realization of the firsts Romansh Week in China to showcase the importance of multilingualism for our national cohesion,' said the Ambassador. Ambassador Burri also expressed his appreciation towards three women from Nanjing present at the Embassy's event, who in 2018 typed up the permanent online version of a paper Romansh dictionary that originated in the 16th century.

Not Vital is a Swiss artist who has travelled and exhibited widely since the 1970s, with an international perspective while still keeping a deep connection with his origins and Romansh culture. His name is a traditional one in Romansh, his mother tongue and a language spoken by only 0.5% of the Swiss population. He has a strong China connection, as he has lived and worked for many years in Beijing,

OPEN

having created many of his iconic pieces here. Not Vital and his artworks will be the cultural highlight of the Week.

This year marks the 85th anniversary since Romansh became Switzerland's national language in 1938. There are five different dialects in Romansh, each of which has its own grammar and vocabulary. Besides dialects, Rumantsch Grischun is the unified written language which became a 'partially official' language of Switzerland in 1996. The Lia Rumantscha, the umbrella organization for the preservation and promotion of Romansh headquartered in Chur, Switzerland, supports, promotes and coordinates the work of all Romansh associations and organisations. Its Secretary General, Mr. Andreas Gabriel, joins the first Emna Rumantscha in China as an expert in the linguistic and cultural history of Romansh.

Multilingualism is an internationally recognized feature of Switzerland. Despite this, Romansh remains a mystery in the eyes of the outside world, and even for many Swiss people. Since the official recognition as a national language, the Swiss government takes active measures to prevent the loss of this cultural heritage, for instance by subsidizing media outlets in Romansh, offering translations for official documents or language courses. This has both increased the everyday use among the maternal language community and the interest in learning Romansh among the other language groups.

The Embassy of Switzerland in China recently proudly announced its "Diversity & Me" cultural campaign for 2023. Under this topic, the Embassy organizes the Romansh thematic week to underline Switzerland's linguistic diversity.

Facts and figures about Romansh:

- German, French and Italian became Switzerland's national languages in 1848.
- Romansh became the fourth national language in 1938.
- In 1996, Romansh was elevated to a 'partially official' language of the Confederation, which means that the most important official communication of the federal government has to be available in Romansh.
- Romansh is the official language in the canton of Graubünden.
- Romansh is mainly spoken in the trilingual canton of Graubünden, that is often referred to as 'little Switzerland' because of its shape and its linguistic diversity.
- 0.5% of Swiss people listed Romansh as one of their main languages in 2019 versus 1.1% in 1910. Around 40,000 people belong to this linguistic minority (Swiss Federal Statistical Office).
- Romansh has five regional varieties which have evolved over time in different valley communities in Graubünden: Sursilvan, Sutsilvan, Surmiran, Puter and Vallader.
- Rumantsch Grischun (the standard written language) is the pan-regional written language of Romansh.

#####

Embassy of Switzerland in China official website: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/beijing>

Embassy of Switzerland in China Weibo: [@瑞士驻华大使馆](#)

Embassy of Switzerland in China WeChat: 别样瑞士 SwissChat

OPEN



Embassy WeChat



Embassy Weibo



Embassy Toutiao

Ms. Li Dan

Press Manager

Culture and Media Section

Embassy of Switzerland in China

Tel: +86 10 8532 8741

Email: dan.li@eda.admin.ch