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Communications of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad

The 51st Assembly of the Swiss Abroad took place in St. Gall from 16th to 19th August, 1973, under the chairmanship of the President, Councillor of States Louis Guisan.

The first two days were mainly devoted to meetings of commissions which not only provided for an exchange of views on the various activities of the Organisation, but also put down directives for the continued development of its work.

The following meetings took place: Commission on Information (responsible for informing Swiss residents abroad on what happens in Switzerland and on Swiss problems, but also for making the activities and problems of the Swiss communities abroad known in Switzerland), co-ordinating information (where various editors and responsible members of the Swiss communities exchanged views on the now established "review" sent four times a year to all Swiss registered at Swiss Embassies and Consulates, with the help of the Swiss Federal Political Department), Council of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, Council of the Solidarity Fund, Foundation for the Swiss Abroad (administering the funds of the Organisation), exchange of views on Swiss schools abroad, Federation of Friends of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, exchange of views between young *Auslandsschweizer*, annual general meeting of the Solidarity Fund, and most important, the meeting of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, the "Little Parliament" and the highest authority within the whole Organisation.

Much useful work was done and many points were cleared up.

OPENING OF THE ASSEMBLY

The official opening of the Assembly took place at the modern Municipal Theatre of St. Gall, some 500 participants being present. The President of the Organisation, Dr. Louis Guisan, welcomed the guests of honour and his compatriots from all parts of the world. He referred to the Organisation's history

since its foundation in 1916 and to the 50th Assembly in Berne last year.

As representatives of the Canton and of the Municipality of St. Gall, *Landammann* Dr. Geiger and *Stadtmann* Dr. Hummler addressed the meeting. The brass and wind band of St. Gall's youth gave an excellent performance during the opening ceremony and delighted the audience by their enthusiasm and high standard.

PLENARY SESSIONS

This year's theme of the Assembly was the activities of Swiss societies and institutions abroad. The Central President of the *Nouvelle Société Helvétique*, Mr. Jean-Claude Nicole opened the Saturday morning session at the Municipal Theatre. He made a fervent appeal to the Swiss at home and abroad not to doubt their own abilities, but to believe in them and to make active use of them, trying to alleviate the difficulties the society of today has to grapple with.

Activities of Swiss Institutions

These were introduced by various members of the Secretariat in Berne. Much research had gone into the presentation of the manifold activities in all parts of the world. Some of the institutions go back 200 years and more, and much loyal work and patriotic devotion has gone into the running of the many organisations, institutions and societies. Many have been the difficulties compatriots abroad have had to face, and not always have they found the necessary understanding and support at home. Nobody could be in doubt after the St. Gall meeting that much valuable work is carried out in the interest not only of Swiss residents abroad but also of the homeland.

Welfare Organisations

The Committee of the "Schweizer Hilfskasse" Vorarlberg/Tirol (Mr. Ausderau, President, Miss Goetzis and Consul Schmid) explained how they deal with relief cases in their part of Austria.

Next came a film taken at the Swiss Home for Old People in Marseilles, showing the problems of a widowed Swiss who finally finds a new abode at the Home.

A second film taken at the Home at Issy-les-Moulineaux, Paris, showed extracts from a gymnastic lesson for old people.

Chambers of Commerce and Economic Institutions

These organisations, so important for the economic life of Switzerland, were represented by Mr. Carlo Steffen, Milan, and Mr. Emil Spahn, Frankfurt.

Cultural Organisations

Mrs. Mariann Meier addressed the assembly on the history, life and problems of the London Group of the *Nouvelle Société Helvétique*, the oldest group abroad of the NSH. Next, the Rev. A. Attinger told of the problems of one of the Swiss Churches abroad, that of Sao Paulo. And finally, there was a discussion between the headmaster of the Swiss School at Bogotá, Mr. Karl Schmid and Mr. Juerg Bachmann, formerly of the Swiss School in Milan.

Youth Clubs

These were represented by Miss Corinne Roth, President of the Swiss Youth Club in Marseilles, and by Mr. Cornelius Kaufmann, President of the Youth Club in Frankfurt.

Sports Organisations and Folklore

Mr. Alfred Ammann, President of the Swiss Gymnastic Society of Paris, told of the activities of his group, and the morning session was closed with a group of Swiss songs by Mrs. Rosmarie Posnanski-Abt, who had given the same performance at the 1st August celebration 1973 of the Swiss Society at Denver, Colorado.

Swiss Houses and Swiss Clubs Overseas

After a well-attended ecumenical lunch provided by the Protestant and

Catholic Church authorities and graced by both the clerical and the secular representatives at the Assembly, the second plenary session opened at 3 p.m.

First there was a film taken by Mr. and Mrs. Phillippe Gonin from Gex, showing the efforts needed to construct a Swiss House. The film was followed by a short talk on the activities of a Swiss Club overseas, given by Mr. M. Meury, President of the Swiss Club, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Address by Federal Councillor Furgler

The chief attraction of the afternoon was the appearance of Federal Councillor Dr. Kurt Furgler, head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police.

The speaker referred to the great importance the Swiss abroad had as representatives of their country. He reminded his audience of the acceptance by the Swiss electorate of the Constitutional Article for the Swiss Abroad and of the various concerns that had already been dealt with by the authorities, such as the Swiss Schools abroad or the social welfare legislation. He also mentioned the political rights of the Swiss abroad and confirmed that the Federal Council had received the report by the special commission, which proposed political rights at federal level. The speaker assured the assembly that it was the real wish of the Federal Council that the draft law would be accepted and passed.

GETTING TO KNOW THE COUNTRY

On Saturday evening the party was invited to a round trip on the Lake of Constance. There was folk music and one had a chance to taste the speciality of the region, the "St. Gall Schueblig".

On Sunday morning, there was an ecumenical service at the Church of St. Mang. This is always one of the most impressive manifestations of any Assembly, and the readings, sermons, the praying and singing in two languages showed once again how tied to the homeland the Swiss abroad really are.

Nine coaches transported the large number of participants through the lovely Appenzell countryside to the Kursaal at Heiden, where the final banquet took place. There was much laughter, fun and companionship, to which the picturesque Appenzell band contributed in no small measure.

All too soon the festivities were at an end. But already one may look forward to next year's Assembly in

Neuchâtel at the end of August. May it be an equal success and also blessed with magnificent weather!

Secretariat of the
Swiss Abroad,
Lucien Paillard.



*Mr. Marbach, from Canada (left)
with Mr. and Mrs. Guisan.*



*Comedian cracking
jokes in Appenzeller*

Mgr. Hasler, Bishop of St. Gall, in conversation with Mr. Giezendanner, of South Africa



Swiss Abroad Invited to Join the Disaster Relief Corps

In a report to Parliament dated 11th August, 1971, the Federal Council stated its intention to set up a voluntary corps for disaster relief abroad. In the spring of the following year the Council designated as Delegate responsible for the realisation of this project Mr. Arthur Bill, Director of the Pestalozzi Village. The Delegate took up his post in the autumn of 1972. He was assigned two senior assistants and a secretariat, he himself officiating only on a part-time basis during the first year. The preparatory work having made rapid progress the first recruiting campaign could be launched last May. The voluntary corps will comprise five main branches: medical, engineering, supply, communications, transport. It is not conceived as a task force kept permanently ready for action, but as a reserve of specialists, from which it will be possible to draw in each case teams capable of bringing relief appropriate to the emergency.

The Swiss corps will probably come into action mostly during the second phase of relief operations (re-establishment of living conditions in the disaster area), as also in the third phase (reconstruction). The aid provided will vary considerably in kind, since each disaster has its own characteristics and unexpected problems. Three main forms of operation are however foreseen:

- medical missions (organised as a rule in conjunction with the Red Cross)
- supply and welfare work
- technical aid (salvage, repair or reconstruction work).

The corps, or some of its components, may take part in missions arranged direct by the Confederation. But the volunteers could also be placed at the disposal of Swiss charitable institutions, such as the Swiss Red Cross, or intergovernmental institutions such as the United Nations. They could also serve under the International Red Cross Committee

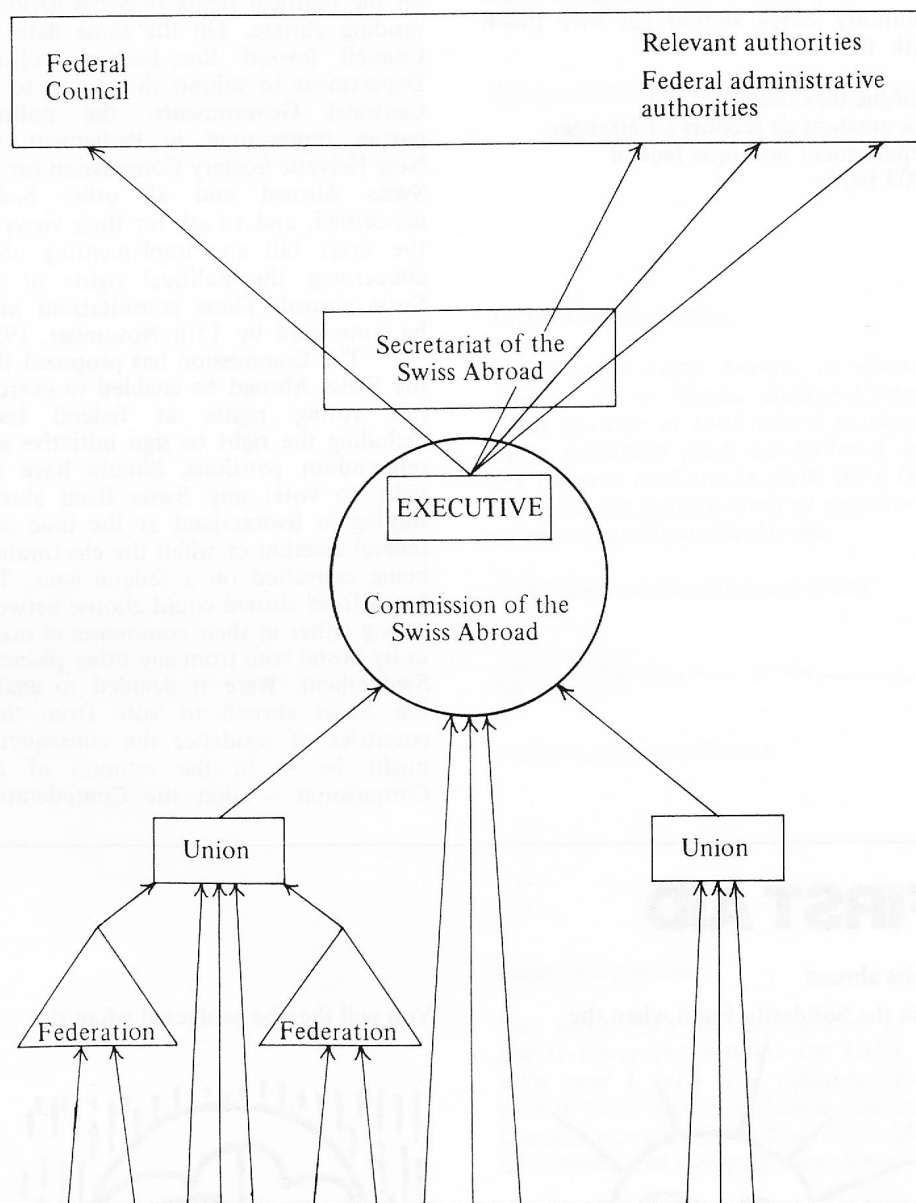
The volunteers will be divided into two active formations and a reserve. Experience over the last few years has shown that for efficient relief operations volunteers must sign on for at least two or three months. How much call-up notice will be given, and for what period of service, will be laid down in the convention in which each volunteer will undertake to participate in one relief mission every two or three years on average.

It is quite obvious that suddenly leaving one's employment for a relatively long period will create problems not only for the volunteer but in many cases also for the employer. Here indeed lies the chief difficulty to be resolved, all the more so since it has so far not proved possible, except in a few cases (that of the medical profession for instance), to establish some kind of equivalence

between military service and relief missions abroad.

By 30th June of this year, the Delegate had received 2,600 requests for application forms, 1,136 of which were returned completed, 993 by men and 143 by women. More than half the candidates (583 of them) were born between 1940 and 1950. Among the first thousand to apply were 833 German-speaking, 90

Diagram showing the channels followed by the requests of the Swiss abroad in order to reach the competent authorities via the different decision-making bodies.



Swiss societies and institutions abroad.

(There were 622 of them at the end of 1972. See also diagram published in last Special Issue).

French-speaking and 22 Italian-speaking Swiss, and 55 foreigners.

Swiss nationals living abroad can join the voluntary corps. Indeed it is hoped that they will do so. But the terms of their contracts will of course not be the same as in the homeland. Most needed will be those Swiss who have long resided in third-world countries or in disaster-prone European countries, and have a thorough knowledge and wide experience of local conditions. Such volunteers could be of inestimable value when participating in a relief mission taking place in their country of residence or a nearby area. Those interested in the voluntary corps should get into touch with the

Délégué du Conseil fédéral
aux missions de secours à l'étranger
Département politique fédéral
3003 Berne

Political Rights for Swiss Abroad?

As announced in the Press, the Federal Council examined on 25th June, 1973, the report dated 21st May, 1973, of the Commission set up to draft a bill on the political rights of Swiss nationals residing abroad. On the same date the Council invited the Federal Political Department to submit this report to the Cantonal Governments, the political parties represented in Parliament, the New Helvetic Society Commission for the Swiss Abroad and all other bodies concerned, and to ask for their views on the draft bill and implementing order concerning the political rights of the Swiss abroad. These consultations must be completed by 15th November, 1973.

The Commission has proposed that the Swiss Abroad be enabled to exercise full voting rights at federal level, including the right to sign initiative and referendum petitions. Should have the right to vote: any Swiss from abroad staying in Switzerland at the time of a federal election or when the electorate is being consulted on a federal issue. The Swiss from abroad could choose between voting either in their communes of origin or by postal vote from any other places in Switzerland. Were it decided to enable the Swiss abroad to vote from their countries of residence the consequence might be — in the opinion of the Commission — that the Confederation

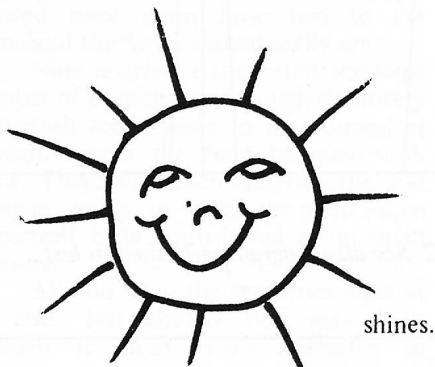
would then also have to grant foreigners living in Switzerland the possibility of exercising their political rights on Swiss territory.

On the conclusion of the current consultations the Federal Council will decide whether their outcome justifies the submission to Parliament of a bill and supporting message to Parliament. Should the parliamentary process be set in motion and the bill approved by both chambers, the new law would still be subject to the optional referendum. It could come into force without being first referred to the electorate only if no call came for a referendum. Thus many months will yet pass before there may be any question of Swiss from abroad exercising their political rights during stays in the home country.

FIRST AID

Swiss abroad

Join the Solidarity Fund when the



You will then be protected when the



What is required:

A savings deposit — either by instalment or single payment.

What is offered:

1. **Fixed compensation** in Swiss francs for loss of livelihood through war and political upheaval.
2. **Refund** of deposit guaranteed by Confederation.

Address: Gutenbergstrasse 6, CH-3011 Berne.

Should something happen to you, the **Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad** will pay you cash up to 40,000 Sw. Fr.