

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 3 (1976)
Heft: 4

Rubrik: [Communications of the Secretariat of the Swiss abroad]

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Ten Years have passed since the Swiss Electorate accepted Art. 45bis of the Federal Constitution



Extracts from the

ADDRESS

by Federal Councillor Pierre Graber, Head of the Federal Political Department, given at Morat on the occasion of the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad on 28th August 1976

I am in the happy position to give you good news: The Federal Council has decided to put in force by 1st January next the legislation regarding *political rights for the Swiss abroad*.

You will no doubt agree with me when I say that this event will be a red-letter day in the history of the Swiss abroad, for it needed patience for over 100 years to reach this goal. To legislate in the field of «Fifth Switzerland» is an arduous task and a difficult art which imply long preparatory work with which the most varied groups have been associated.

Let us consider now what has been achieved during the past 10 years. In the first place we have to mention the federal law regarding *social assistance to Swiss abroad*. It used to fall to the Cantons to look after compatriots in need. And they had hardly the financial nor the technical means to apply their own legislation abroad. From this, many practical difficulties arose, even injustices. Last year, an amount of about 4 million Swiss francs was distributed to more than 2,000 compatriots in need.

The second law which has to be emphasized here concerns the *military exemption tax* payable by the Swiss abroad, a law accepted in 1973 and which has been in force since 1st January 1974. It is an excellent example of the efforts made by the federal authorities to do the best possible for the Swiss abroad and their particular situation. According to this law, Swiss citizens who have been resident abroad for more than three years, are exempt from paying this tax. This solution has contributed considerably to improve relations between our compatriots abroad and the Swiss authorities.

The third law concerns help to *Swiss schools abroad*. These were, without exception, created due to private initiative and organised on the basis of private legislation. But this must not overshadow the fact that these institutions – there are at the moment 19 of them – could not survive without assistance from the Confederation. It is gratifying that Parliament accepted the legal draft proposal made by the Federal Council, for the parliamentary procedure took place at a time when the financial position of the

Confederation forced all authorities to make savings in expenditure.

The fourth federal law, as I mentioned at the beginning, is devoted to the *political rights of the Swiss abroad*. Without doubt, this Constitutional Article was the most difficult task for the federal authorities. It was necessary to take into account various aspects, varied and sometimes even contradictory. Although political rights in federal matters only were under discussion, legislation in the Cantons, even the Communes, played a decisive part. One can't stress often enough that the exercise of political rights is a complicated matter in our country. Procedure is not necessarily the same in Liestal or Lugano as at Morges or at Trogen. That meant coordinating and harmonising the possibilities of our diplomatic and consular representatives with those of the Cantons and Communes.

The first federal plebiscite at which you may take part will probably be the one on 13th March 1977. In order to be able to form a considered opinion, the citizen has to have extensive information available. This is even more important for the citizen who comes from abroad.

Finally, I am anxious to mention that the Constitutional Article regarding the Swiss abroad allowed the Federal Council already in 1967 to promulgate *regulations for the diplomatic and consular service*. These contain several directions concerning the Swiss abroad, notably in the matter of diplomatic and consular protection, important today more than ever. At a time when we have to intervene in conditions often dramatic regarding Swiss citizens arbitrarily arrested or victims of nationalisation, I have to remind you that we must ask of those concerned to take on themselves the defence of their interests in the first place. We grant them our assistance from the moment it is clear that they have exhausted all means at their disposal. The Confederation can, of course, not give any guarantee that their intervention will be crowned with success.

To sum up, it must be recognized that the time of 10 years elapsed since 1966 has not been wasted if one looks at the total legislation since then. Most substantial legislative measures have been taken. They could be undertaken thanks to the goodwill of all and especially due to the constructive and unceasing collaboration which the federal authorities have enjoyed from the part of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad.

I should like now to turn to the future. Although the problems pending for so long have been solved by and large as I have described it, certain questions remain. I am thinking for instance of the revision of the *penal procedure in military matters*. This will regulate in a better way the question of absence of certain Swiss resident abroad. Social insurance, above all the *voluntary AVS* (old-age insurance), presents certain problems too. This insurance has developed considerably since its inception in 1948, as indeed have social insurance schemes in many other countries. The structural problems of the voluntary AVS have to be examined with care. Studies are involved in which, as hitherto, the representatives of «Fifth Switzerland» are consulted.

It is our task to offer our compatriots the possibility of protecting themselves against certain blows of fate. This is the practical and typically Swiss application of the saying «Heaven helps those who help themselves». At present, the most impressive example of what I have said is probably the cooperative body of the *Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad*. This organisation has achieved a real feat: in fact, it offers at most favourable conditions adequate protection against war risk, nationalisation, risks which no insurance company could possibly cover.

Another example which I should like to underline illustrates better than fine words the policy of the Confederation in the matter of the Swiss abroad. I should like to mention *information* to which an increased amount of attention has been devoted during the past few years. We have all felt the need to improve and modernise your information. We have tried to evade everything which could have given rise to the view that such information was official and in a way state-controlled. On the contrary, true to well-tried tradition, we have made use of the already existing publications in a number of Swiss communities abroad.

These bulletins serve the umbrella organisations of the Swiss abroad, but also the local societies. They are also at the disposal of the federal authorities, for they contain official information which our compatriots would do well to read carefully. A gratifying realisation: this bulletin works well without the necessity of creating a complicated administrative apparatus. I am happy to state this and I thank the Commission of the Swiss Abroad for contributing so effectively in this system of information.

Badges of the Swiss abroad

The following flags and badges for the Swiss abroad specially made for you, may be had from the Secretariat of the Swiss abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3000 Berne 16. Details are given below. Prices are in Swiss francs and do not include postage.

Application form

1. Flag with AS sign*

Hemmed edges

| | with- out | with swivel hook (Fr. 2.- extra) |
|------------------------|--------------|--|
| a) 30x 50 cm Fr. 40.— | No: _____ | |
| b) 50x 50 cm Fr. 42.— | No: _____ | |
| c) 50x 75 cm Fr. 45.— | No: _____ | |
| d) 75x 75 cm Fr. 52.— | No: _____ | |
| e) 75x100 cm Fr. 55.— | No: _____ | |
| f) 100x100 cm Fr. 60.— | No: _____ | |

2. Swiss flag*

worked in cotton cretonne, reinforced edges

| | with- out | with swivel hook (Fr. 2.- extra) |
|------------------------|--------------|--|
| a) 60x 60 cm Fr. 14.— | No: _____ | |
| b) 80x 80 cm Fr. 19.— | No: _____ | |
| c) 100x100 cm Fr. 27.— | No: _____ | |
| d) 120x120 cm Fr. 34.— | No: _____ | |
| e) 150x150 cm Fr. 46.— | No: _____ | |

*These flags are available in other sizes, but on special demand only.

3. Coloured car stickers « 5th Switzerland »

Swiss flag on blue ground, in synthetic material

Diameter 8 cm, Fr. 2.— per piece

Number required: _____

4. Coloured badges for Swiss abroad

Swiss flag on silver ground

a) lapel badge Fr. 3.—

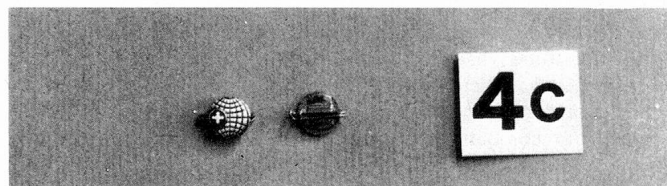
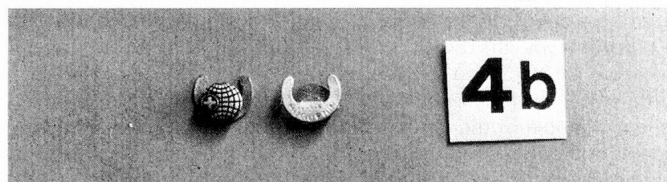
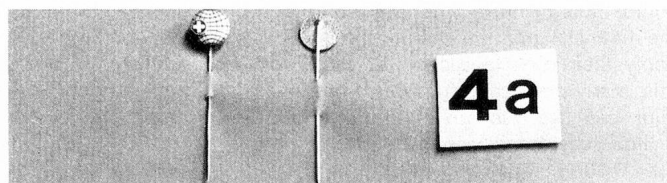
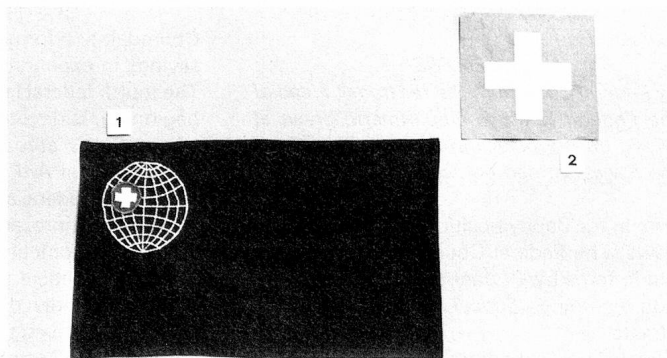
Number required: _____

b) buttonhole badge Fr. 3.—

Number required: _____

c) badge with safety pin Fr. 3.—

Number required: _____



Please write number required on the lines.

Name and Christian name: _____

Address: _____

Postal number / Locality: _____

Date and signature: _____