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Decisions of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad

On Friday the 21st of August 1981 the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, presided over by former National Councillor Dr. Alfred Weber, assembled in the parliamentary chamber of the Canton of Solothurn at the city hall in Solothurn for its regular autumn session. Among the numerous delegates from four continents one noted in particular the Honorary President of the Organization of the Swiss Abroad Louis Guisan, who recently celebrated his seventieth birthday, and Paul Schaffroth, the President of the New Helvetic Society.

With satisfaction the delegates approved the appointment of four new domestic members of the commission. Under the condition of approval by the Central Committee of the New Helvetic Society, the following four parliamentarians have been elected members of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad: *Mrs. Esther Bührer*, Senator from the Canton of Schaffhausen, former teacher at the Swiss school in Bogota.

Mrs. Hedi Lang, National Councillor from Wetzikon, Canton Zurich, former member of a primary school board.

Mr. Odilo Guntern, Senator from Canton Valais, attorney and notary, member of the Swiss delegation to the Council of Europe.

Mr. Claude Bonnard, National Councillor, lawyer, former member of the Government of the Canton of Vaud. With this strengthened delegation one hopes to intensify the contact to the chambers of Parliament.

Furthermore, the Commission of the Swiss Abroad took note of the planned abolition of the federal subsidies for the Swiss schools in Florence, Genoa and Naples. Disappointment was expressed clearly about this. One expressed the hope that the 1,4 million Swiss francs saved in the process would be used for other Swiss schools abroad. The commission, however, was sceptical that the Government would use this amount for anything but saving. Nevertheless the commission refrained from making a protest resolution since it is of the opinion that this would only have a negative effect on the coming talks with Federal Councillor Hürlimann, the Head of the Department of the Interior.

In addition, the Commission of the Swiss Abroad was informed about the results of the survey on political rights. One was very satisfied about the level of participation of the Swiss abroad. It was pointed out that similar surveys in Switzerland had similar levels of participation. Although only a small percentage of the Swiss abroad answered the survey, one felt that the results gave a clear indication of opinion among the Swiss abroad. One was especially happy about the fact that the younger generation, in particular the age group 34 to 39, showed above average participation.

(For the results of this survey see page 11)



Survey of the Swiss Abroad on Voting Rights

The March issue of the «Swiss Review» included a survey on voting rights of the Swiss abroad. Here are the most important results:

By the deadline (15th of May 1981) 6333 Swiss men and women abroad filled in and sent back the questionnaire. Of these 1328 were already registered to vote, i. e.,

have taken part more or less regularly so far in federal voting on issues and in elections.

The relationship of the minors without the right to vote to the total number of registered Swiss abroad is not known. If we assume the same relationship as in Switzerland, which is 27,2% minors, we get a figure of 257 881 citizens,

in Switzerland and about one-third abroad.

5700 fellow citizens favour a solution permitting them to vote from abroad; that is almost 90% of the participants. Of these 4405 favoured voting by post from abroad, and 1311 favoured voting personally at Swiss embassies and consulates.

Based on continents, the participation gives the following picture:

Continent	Number of registered Swiss abroad (including minors)	% of registered Swiss abroad	Participants in survey	% of total number of participants	% participants in relation to total registered Swiss abroad
Europe	210 566	59,44	4717	74,48	2,24
America	102 204	28,85	807	12,74	0,78
Asia	9 744	2,75	290	4,57	2,97
Africa	17 698	4,99	323	5,10	1,82
Austr./Oceania	14 020	3,95	196	3,09	1,39
	354 232		6333		
		1,78%			

about 21%. Therefore, an additional 5005 Swiss abroad, through their participation, showed their interest in the survey on voting rights. Of the 1328 Swiss abroad, who were already registered and who answered the survey, 685 or 51,58%

who are of age and therefore could make use of the right to vote. Of these people, 6333 participated in the survey. That is 2,45% of the adult citizens registered to vote. Among the participants in the survey, about two-thirds were born

*Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
Service for the Swiss Abroad*

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