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# The Conference of the Swiss Abroad

«Les absents ont toujours tort». The truth of this statement was clearly demonstrated again in the course of the 60th Conference of the Swiss Abroad, held in Sierre in Canton Valais on August 20-22, 1982. Sierre, situated on the language border but with a clearly Latin atmosphere, offered a pleasant background for this year's conference because of its setting. Even if the blazing sun of the city flag was not visible at the start, the wonderful weather on the Sunday outing to the Lac de Chermignon on the Plateau of Montana and the cordial reception by the authorities and populace of Sierre made up for it.

As usual Friday was devoted to the Meeting of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, which did not take place in Sierre, however, but in the parliamentary chamber of the neighboring cantonal capital Sion. Once again the main theme was the citizenship issue. The commission passed a resolution (see box) which noted with satis-



Mrs. Ruedin during her speech. At her right Mr. Ney, who directed the plenary assembly. (Photo Rodo)

faction that the Council of States, in dealing with the message of the Federal Council on revision of citizenship laws, had acknowledged the interests of the Organization of the Swiss Abroad. The Council of States spoke in favor of

dividing the issue into points concerning Swiss women abroad and points involving the simplification of laws enabling young foreigners, refugees and stateless persons to gain citizenship.

In addition, the Commission of the Swiss Abroad brought up again the unsolved problem of the discrimination against the wives of Swiss living abroad who are paying obligatory AHV. As is well known these women have no right to IV payments following a controversial court decision. Even if in one of the most extreme cases the individuals involved did not have to pay back IV payments which were allegedly unjustifiably paid to them, the discrimination against such people continues nevertheless. The Commission of the Swiss Abroad, therefore, is urging the responsible authorities in a petition (see box) to remedy the situation, applying the new law retroactively.

Because it poured rain the official opening could not be held outside as planned, but had to be held at

From left to right: Mrs. Walz, Mrs. Adatte and Mrs. Monney. (Photo Rodo)



## Petition

The Commission of the Swiss Abroad of the New Helvetic Society at its meeting in Sierre on August 20, 1982, noted with dismay that certain Swiss women living abroad are still severely disadvantaged. Concerned are those women whose husbands belong to the compulsory AHV scheme in spite of foreign domicile, and therefore do not belong to the voluntary AHV scheme.

In the opinion of the Commission of the Swiss abroad, foreign residence should not have a negative impact on the rights of Swiss wives abroad. They should be treated on an equal basis with Swiss women at home.

The Commission of the Swiss Abroad has been informed of some very severe and regrettable cases of discrimination within the framework of the new practice. It therefore urges the authorities to remedy the situation without delay, if necessary within the framework of the voluntary insurance, all the more so as the present regulation contradicts the fundamental principle that the wife of a Swiss citizen can belong to the Swiss AHV only through her husband.

On the basis of these considerations the Commission of the Swiss Abroad proposes that the necessary measures be applied retroactively, and it hopes for the understanding of the authorities in order to do justice to our citizens abroad without waiting for the next revision of the first pillar of our social security scheme.

in these three cases integration proved not to be too difficult, the situation is altogether different when a Swiss woman marries a foreigner. Listening to Mrs. Bayard (Italy) and to Mrs. Ruys (The Netherlands) it was easy to see what problems the children of these women face. Although they are often raised as Swiss and although they speak our language, they remain foreigners simply because they were born abroad. This has consequences when choosing a profession or a field of study in Switzerland. The absurd situation that one of the children of a family is Swiss because he was born in Switzerland, the other a foreigner since born abroad, is not infrequent.

It is a nice tradition among many Swiss women abroad to be active in charity and other social activities. Mrs. Walz from Germany, Mrs. Monney from Italy and Mrs. Adatte from France told the large audience, which vigorously applauded each contribution, of their efforts in favor of needy fellow citizens and community institutions like the Swiss school in Rome. In addition to the socially active Swiss woman abroad we find the professional women. Mrs. Ditchburn (Scotland) told her

the city hall. Any initial disappointment disappeared quickly, however, in view of the successful presentations of a Valais folk dance group in costume. While Mayor Berclaz gave a short and pleasant introduction to Sierre, the President of the cantonal government of Valais spoke about the affinity of the people of Valais with the Swiss abroad. He explained this a bit maliciously with the remark that the people of Valais feel in Switzerland sometimes like Swiss abroad. This year's meeting was dedicated to Swiss women abroad

because of the constitutional amendment «Equal Rights for Men and Women» which was passed last year.

And the highlight of this year's annual reunion was the plenary session of Saturday morning. Under the direction of Marcel Ney, director of the Secretariat of the Swiss abroad, several women presented their view of the activities and problems of Swiss women abroad. Mrs. Dudle (New Zealand), Mrs. Ruedin (Argentina) and Mrs. Mueller (Senegal) discussed the difficulties of integrating in a foreign country. Whereas

During the plenary assembly. In the front row we recognize from right to left: Mrs. Monney, Mrs. Ruys, Mrs. Meier, Mrs. Ditchburn and Mrs. von Grünigen.



Wine and cheese were served in Chermignon-Dessous.

(Photos Rodo)





During the official opening

listeners about her teaching at a comprehensive school in Dumferline. Mrs. Studer (Argentina), was originally active as a lecturer; nowadays she is in charge of a large cattle farm. Mrs. Marianne von Gruenigen finally, one of the few women with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, drew our attention to the fact that

very often it is nearly impossible for a women to be active professionally since only the man gets a work permit.

The morning round of talks came to an end with the contributions of Mrs. Ilse Frei (Belgium) and Mrs. Mariann Meier (England) who told their listeners of their efforts in spreading Swiss culture

Folkdance groups were the attraction of the Sunday excursion.

(Photos Rodo)



and values. While the former holds an open house for talks and concerts, the other has been active for many years as the editor of the Swiss Observer and as the president of the New Helvetic Society in London.

The afternoon was devoted to the speech of Federal Councillor Aubert, who spoke to the Swiss abroad on the relations of Switzerland to the UN, a topic which is preoccupying his department. He presented the argument that in view of the growing international interdependence, which Switzerland cannot avoid, admission to the UN fits into the traditional pragmatic foreign policy of Switzerland. Swiss foreign relations were originally limited to consulates which protected the Swiss colonies abroad, and only later was the present-day network of

## Resolution

The Commission of the Swiss Abroad of the New Helvetic Society passed the following *resolution* at its meeting on August 20, 1982.

The Commission of the Swiss Abroad has noted with satisfaction that the message of the Federal Council of April 7, 1982, did justice to the parliamentary initiative of its president submitted on March 23, 1979, by planning a revision of the Constitutional Law on citizenship in favour of the children of Swiss women abroad and foreign fathers.

The Commission of the Swiss Abroad also noted positively that the Council of States as the first council has followed the commission's well-founded arguments that this problem should be submitted separately to public vote.

The Commission now appeals to the National Council as the second council to agree to a separate treatment for political reasons and reasons of time.

Finally, the Commission considers it important and urgent that the solution being sought be adapted already to the revision being made in the law on citizenship.

diplomatic posts abroad built up. The Federal Councillor stressed that today the point has been reached where the logical step of joining the UN must be taken. Federal Councillor Aubert's address offered the Swiss abroad a good opportunity to express their sincere thanks to retiring Minister Maurice Jaccard for his many years in the service of the Swiss

abroad (For more about Mr. Jaccard see page 21). A dinner, which went off well with musical performances by the well-known Valais composer and conductor Jean Daetwyler, rounded up Saturday's program. The day ended rather late, some people not getting to bed before 4 a.m. A bit tired, but in good spirits, one met the following

morning for the Sunday outing. After wine and cheese in Chermignon, one had another opportunity to make friends in the beautiful mountain setting of Montana Crans. Raclette, wine from the cask and folk dances in native costume made for a genuine Valais atmosphere.

*Jörg Kistler*

## New items for the Swiss Abroad

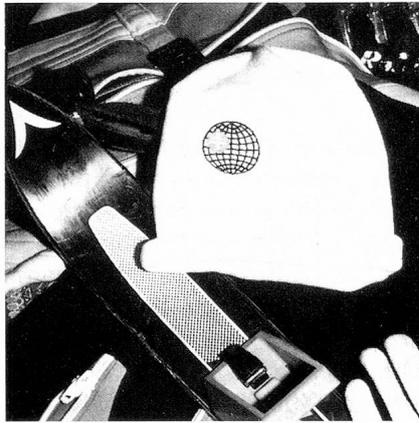
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