

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 12 (1985)
Heft: 2

Artikel: A man in the service of the Swiss abroad
Autor: Schürch, Gerhart / Franzoni, Isabella
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907712>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 22.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

This encouraged him, and he once again started out for the north. In the village of Petté he began a fourth hospital. When it was completed, he gave the keys to Anna Maria Schoenenberger, a Lausanne doctor.

Baba Maggi as many natives call him familiarly, has a new idea, to continue his way to Zinah, the beautiful village in the middle of the savannah. He discovered it one night due to a puncture on his jeep. It is already 11 years now since the hospital there became operational.

A sixth hospital, the last in the row, was opened at Mada-Masaki in 1982, for Dr. Maggi could not be prevented from moving on his way. And he not only treats the sick, but does everything in his power to make sure that the fight will be carried on after his departure.

He is general practitioner and specialist all in one, surgeon, children's doctor, dentist, physiologist, but also an architect, and he knows everything about mechanics, he can picture a building-site in all details, and all this is by no means the end of the list.

On 3rd March 1985, Dr. Maggi will celebrate his 75th birthday and complete 40 years in the service of mankind.

Our best wishes on your birthday, Dr. Maggi, and many thanks! I. F.



has ceased trading

A man in the service of the Swiss abroad



Q: Dr Schuerch, you, like few others, are attached to the work of the Organization of Swiss Abroad. You started your professional career as a young lawyer at the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad, on the staff and as member of various committees from 1934 to 1941. From 1943 onward you belonged to the Commission of the Swiss Abroad,

which you presided over from 1959–1966. What led you to this «vocation»? How did you get involved with the problems of «Fifth Switzerland»?

A: As newly graduated lawyer, 24 years old, I was looking for a job as many other lawyers had to at that time. The Confederation reduced pay at a time of deflation, whilst the Secretariat of the Swiss abroad paid me Fr. 600.– a month, which enabled me to marry my fiancée.

Yet the problems of the Swiss abroad were not entirely unknown to me, for my father had chaired the Commission of the Swiss Abroad for a number of years. In addition, a period abroad at the age of 19 allowed me to get acquainted at first hand with the problems which I later had to face.

Gerhart Schuerch

Born on 23rd March 1910, in Bienne
Lawyer, Dr iur.

1934–1940	On the staff of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad
1943–1984	Member of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad
1949–1953	Central President of the New Helvetic Society
1959–1966	President of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad
1941–1944	Minors' Counsel of the Bernese Oberland
1947–1948	Delegate of the Schweizerspende/Don Suisse
1962–1975	Finance Director of the Municipality of Berne
1962–1971	Member of the Berne Grand Council
1968	Head of mission of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the Civil War in Nigeria (Biafra).
1971–1979	National Councillor
1976–1980	Delegate to the Council of Europe

In the army, he was Colonel on the General Staff and commanded a mountain infantry regiment.

At the Assembly of Swiss Abroad in Basle in May 1984, Dr. Schuerch gave his resignation as member of the Commission. We should like to express our thanks for his devoted work and are sure to do this in the name of all Swiss compatriots abroad, for they were able to benefit for many years from his work in their interest.

Q: Why did you get so enthusiastic about this work?

A: My first job as colleague of a personality I admired greatly gave me much satisfaction: Miss Alice Briod, Director of the Secretariat from 1959 until her retirement after 32 years in the service of the Swiss abroad. It was at that time that I became fascinated by the work and I have remained attached to the Organization for my whole life. It was normal that I was proposed as member of the Commission when I left the Secretariat. Later, as President of the New Helvetic Society, I again became confronted with the problems of our compatriots abroad, for the Organization of Swiss Abroad is the only offspring of the NSH which has always stood loyally by its mother. As a lawyer I was completely free to arrange my additional activi-

ties. Some of my colleagues joined boards of directors, but I preferred to occupy myself with the Swiss abroad, and in fact, I even renounced some of my professional duties in order to reorganize the administration and working methods of the Secretariat as Vice-President of the Organization (1958/59). Following that, I was elected President of the Organization.

Q: What was the most important aspect of the remodelling of the Organization of the Swiss Abroad?

A: The basic idea of the reorganisation of 1959 was to involve the Swiss abroad more in the national life of Switzerland and to give it a juridical status which would not prevent further development and yet preserve the close ties between the NSH and the Organization of Swiss Abroad

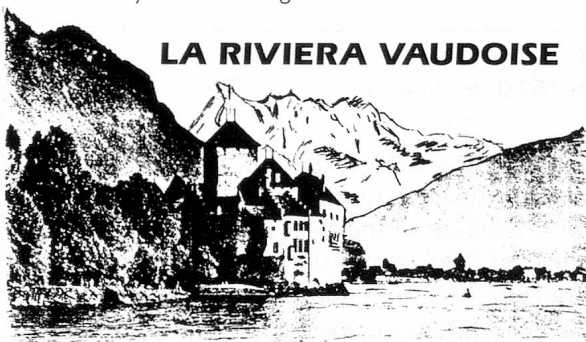
(OSA). At the same time, the Secretariat had to be strengthened. Fundamentally, the aim was to make the Commission into a political instrument and to change the originally almost family-like body (a kind of private club), into a representative and therefore more effective institution. The Commission had to become flexible enough to preserve the democratic principles in representing it in the outside world and at the same time to do justice to the extremely diversified positions and wishes of the Swiss communities abroad.

Q: Amongst the many tasks one can couple with your name, we have already mentioned that of Central President of the New Helvetic Society. Which are the real ties between the OSA and its mother society?

(Continuation page 20)

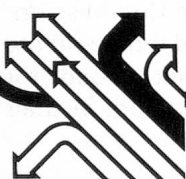
RELAXATION - HOLIDAYS - RETIREMENT

Here is your chance of becoming the owner of a flat or a house in idyllic surroundings in a mild climate on the



and what's more, at the moment still at favourable prices. You will be one hour away from Geneva, two hours from Zurich and half an hour from famous skiing resorts.

Try and plan a visit to Montreux when you are next in Switzerland and ask already now for the brochure «**Vue panoramique**» on the above flats and houses. It will give us pleasure to meet you and to show you the attractions of these surroundings without any obligation on your part.



COFIDECO SA
Agence immobilière

Grand-Rue 52
1820 Montreux (Suisse)
Tél. 021 63 73 73

At the interesting and unique initiative of the Cultural Centre of the Val-de-Travers, a

NATIONAL OPEN-AIR EXHIBITION OF SCULPTURE

will take place at Môtiers in the Canton of Neuchâtel from 22nd June to 21st September, organized by the Centre.

The exhibition which will show works by some 60 sculptors amongst the best of Switzerland, will be spread over a whole area. It will be necessary to walk for two hours in order to see the whole exhibition in natural surroundings, meadows and forests. For elderly people, some parts will be accessible by car.

Visitors will be received at the Maison des Mascarons where the small pieces are exhibited. From there, the walk takes one through the historic 18th century village up to the Plat de Riaux, passing the waterfall. The visitors descend on the other side of the mountain, then along the Sourde and returning to the village centre.

When you are in Switzerland on holiday, we invite you to come and admire this wonderful panorama of Swiss sculpture of the end of the 20th century and to spend a cultural afternoon in the open. You will be delighted!

A: After its foundation in 1914, the NSH soon acquired groups abroad: London, Athens etc., Swiss organizations which became members of the OSA and which added to their names the three letters NSH (Nouvelle Société Helvétique). Gradually, the framework extended by admitting all kinds of Swiss groups abroad, rifle shooting societies, welfare organizations, gymnastic groups etc. The Organization became a more comprehensive community and lost its originally rather elitist character; it became the representative inside Switzerland of all groups of Swiss abroad.

The ties between the mother society and its daughter are close without, however, being rigid; the Organization and the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad have a great deal of freedom in their work and have also kept financial independence.

Q: Let us take a step backwards and reminisce: what were your worries during the period you worked at the Secretariat?

A: A number of questions were pending at the time, some of which are still topical today. Probably the most momentous, at least on the financial side, was the problem of military exemption tax. It actually concerned a rather small problem, but one which was particularly irksome to our compatriots abroad. The dissatisfaction caused by levying this tax, at first for an unlimited time and afterwards for the first 8 years after emigrating, was a fact. It went so far that some of our compatriots began to disassociate themselves from their homeland because of it. This became an increasing tendency as naturalization became easier and with growing antipathy towards the federal authorities and their representatives abroad. Later, a compromise solution was found: the principle was

adhered to, but the liability period was reduced to three years only, the first of any stay abroad.

A second important problem was that of making the Organization of the Swiss Abroad into a genuine representative body of the Swiss abroad and their interests, to an organization recognized by the Swiss authorities.

Political rights were another thorny problem. A first stage was reached in 1966 when people and Cantons accepted the Constitutional Article 45bis. This gave the Confederation the competence to strengthen the ties between the Swiss abroad and their homeland. Consequently one reached a further stage in 1975 when, with many difficulties and opposition also from some of the Swiss communities abroad, legislation regarding political rights was completed, allowing the Swiss abroad, through their official representation, to register either in their Commune of origin or in the last place of domicile in Switzerland and to take part in federal plebiscites. At the moment, the question is being studied to give the Swiss abroad the right to postal voting, but this will not be very easy.

Q: What was the role of the Secretariat during the Second World War?

A: During mobilisation and the return of a number of Swiss from abroad, some very complicated problems arose. Many Swiss emigrants returned to do active military service without having had call-up papers. With the introduction of the military wage compensation, the social problem, at least, could be solved in a satisfactory way.

Great difficulties arose at the end of the war when a large number of compatriots, specially from Germany, arrived at our frontiers as refugees. With that we reached one of the most delicate chapters in our history, the reassimilation

of uprooted Swiss, mostly without means, often returning to their country of origin which they and their families had not seen for generations. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs created several bodies which looked after these repatriated compatriots. The Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad tried to cope with various difficulties which faced these Swiss refugees.

Q: How do you see the development of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad?

A: Allow me a preliminary remark: one has tried again and again to transform the Secretariat into a Federal Office for Swiss Abroad. In my opinion, this would be a mistake. Everything must be done for the Secretariat to remain a private institution, one which is respected, to which one pays attention, one which one promotes, even in the financial field, and this by voluntary effort. The Organization of Swiss Abroad must try to become even more representative, a fully viable partner on federal level for all questions concerning the Swiss abroad and above all also in the consultative promulgation procedure.

It also has to be said that due to a structural alteration in the Swiss communities abroad, their character has been changed. Periods spent abroad are now more often limited, and the problems are different ones. It becomes more and more difficult to organize the various Swiss communities. The Secretariat in Berne has fulfilled this task very well, but one must persist in these efforts and find solutions which are interesting to the new generation, possibly by co-operating with the management of large Swiss concerns which send staff abroad; they could possibly act as a kind of «transmission belt». In my view, this is a new task for the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad.

Interviewer by Isabella Franzoni