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The autumn session of the Council for the Swiss Abroad

Preserving Swiss schools

Education and the optional state insurance scheme were the main subjects discussed at the autumn session of the Council for the Swiss Abroad. The meeting was the first of the new 1997-2001 term of office.

After 1993, the spring of 1997 saw the second general election for members of the Council for the Swiss Abroad (CSA). The number of vacancies again fell and the proportion of women elected rose, which once

more increased the representative character of this body.

28 leading figures from the worlds of politics, economics and culture were appointed by the council as domestic members, and a nine-person executive with Jean-Jacques Cevey at its head was elected, also for a four-year period. Jean-Paul Aeschlimann (from France) replaces Jacques Dreier (also from France).

The main business consisted of two practical matters. With respect to the optional state old-age and dis-

ability insurance scheme, the council took cognisance with satisfaction of the fact that the Federal Council had sent the administration's reform proposal back for revision. It maintained with emphasis the demands made at the spring session (see Swiss Review 3/97).

The council also expressed alarm about developments regarding Swiss schools abroad (see Swiss Review 4/97) and passed a resolution demanding that federal subsidies to all such schools should be maintained. They were not only institutions which were greatly loved wherever they were, but they were also an important pillar of Switzerland's presence abroad. They were therefore of the greatest importance, particularly in Europe.

Death of Claude Thalman

The chairman of the Committee for Swiss Schools Abroad, Claude Thalman, has died at the age of 59. The Swiss schools have lost a most efficient and highly committed advocate.

The council was unanimous in the view that the Federal Council's efforts to overcome the crisis of identity in which Switzerland at present finds itself should be supported. It particularly welcomed all initiatives which were in Switzerland's tradition of solidarity, humanitarian endeavour and openness to the world.

The council admitted twelve new Swiss Abroad groups (six in Italy, two in France, and one each in Chile, China, Spain and the United States).

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To secure respect within the international community, a nation must be willing and able to stand up for the things it rightly believes in. Order the keynote speeches held by National Council member Christoph Blocher, dealing with the situation of Switzerland in the Second World War and the disregard for the principles of Swiss neutrality evinced in the US Administration.

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- Speech held in Zurich on 1 March 1997: «Switzerland and the Second World War»
- Speech held on 21 June 1997: «Switzerland and the Eizenstat Report»
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The 75th Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lugano

Of culture and cultures

About 500 people from 38 countries took part in this year's Congress of the Swiss Abroad, which was devoted to 'The Cultural Presence of Switzerland in the World'. Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi commended to the Swiss the values of openness, solidarity and self-reliance.

The expression 'Swiss culture' has to be put between inverted commas because one Swiss culture does not exist, but rather a plurality of cultures. This concept, elaborated at the outset by David Streiff, director of the Federal Office of Cultural Affairs, ran right through the congress like a thread.

For Jean-Jacques Cevey, president of the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad, in his concluding address, the remarkable variety leads to a situation in which Swiss cultural creation abroad is fre-

quently not even recognised as Swiss. In addition – and this is particularly reflected in the four linguistic cultures – this variety renders it difficult to define a cultural policy and in particular to take practical measures to promote Swiss culture.

Increased promotion for culture

However, at present this form of promotion seems particularly necessary, since culture exercises a substantial influence on the image of Swit-

zerland abroad. It is neither necessary nor possible to take short-term emergency damage-limitation measures, said Mr. Cevey, but culture can put a positive stamp upon our image over the medium and long term.

"Dismantlement has its limits"

Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi stated his conviction that 150 years after it was founded the Swiss federal state could still be a model, a construction of lasting value, but only if oriented towards the values of openness, solidarity and self-reliance. This includes solidarity with the Fifth Switzerland. Like all other fields, the optional state old-age and disability insurance scheme and the Swiss schools abroad would have to bear with budget

Katrin Wyss: 25 years at the SSA

On October 23, Katrin Wyss will be able to celebrate 25 years of work at the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad. Originally taken on in 1972 as a bookkeeper, she has been top secretary of the Committee for Swiss Schools Abroad since 1980. Warm congratulations!



Federal Councillor Ogi being greeted by Swiss Abroad recruits. (Photo: SSA)

cuts, but Mr. Ogi promised that dismantlement would have its limits, since "the interests of the Swiss Abroad are also the interests of Switzerland".

The congress programme included an address by Ticino architect Mario Botta, a concert evening, a banquet and an excursion. Next year's congress will take place on August 20-23 in Canton Aargau.

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Friends of the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad

Join the Club with Adolf Ogi

The objective laid down by the Friends of the OSA is to ensure the long-term financing of the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad, whose sole purpose is to serve the interests of our compatriots abroad. This year's Congress of the Swiss Abroad not only saw Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi spontaneously decide to join the

Friends as a life member, but is also organising a lottery with a number of attractive prizes.

Anyone who joins the Friends as a life member by December 31, 1997, and pays the minimum membership fee of Sfr. 500.– will automatically take part in the draw, which will take place at the spring session

of the Council for the Swiss Abroad next March.

First prize:

A week's stay for two persons in a deluxe apartment on the beach at San Diego, USA (donated by Max Hächler)

Other prizes:

- Attendance free of charge for two persons at the 1998 Congress of the Swiss Abroad, including a ticket for all Congress events and accommodation for two nights (donated by the town of Baden and the OSA)

- Three weekends for two persons at Antwerp, Belgium (donated by the Swiss Club of Antwerp), at Scottsdale, USA (donated by Max Hächler) and at Torquay, England (donated by Max Singer).

- A gold vreneli, or 20-franc piece (donated by Elisabeth Michel).

Application form, with participation in the lottery

I/we apply to join the Friends of the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad as a life member. I wish to pay the one-time membership fee of Sfr. 500.– (minimum):

by making an early transfer to the Friends' Swiss National Giro (postal cheque) account: 30-10580-7 in Berne, or

through my/our Eurocard/Mastercard/Visa (please underline)

Card no. Valid till

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Date Signature

Please send by December 31, 1997 (date of postage), to the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3000 Berne 16, fax 41 31 351 61 50. Many thanks for your interest.

Ski camps 1997/98

The Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad is once again organising winter sports camps for young Swiss Abroad over New Year. 8-15 year olds will meet at Splügen (December 27–January 3), and 15–25 year olds at Zweisimmen (December 27–January 4). The Easter camp for 15-25 year olds will take place at Grimmentz. Further information and registration at: Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad Alpenstrasse 26 CH-3000 Berne 16 Tel: 41 31 351 61 00 Fax: 41 31 351 61 50