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Spring session of the Council for the Swiss Abroad

No cutbacks at the expense of the Fifth Switzerland

Swiss Abroad warn against budget cuts at the expense of the Fifth Switzerland. At the spring session on 22 March 2003 in Berne's Rathaus, the Council for the Swiss Abroad (CSA) also discussed the forthcoming parliamentary elections.

The CSA – the 150-member “parliament of the Fifth Switzerland” – is the governing body of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA).

“The Fifth Switzerland is an increasingly important political force.” To illustrate his statement, former National Councillor and OSA President Georg Stucky cited the referendum on 24 November 2002 “against the abuse of asylum rights”, the outcome of which was determined by the Swiss Abroad vote. While the majority of cantons voted in favour of the initiative, the result of the people’s vote was 50.1 percent NO versus 49.9 percent Yes: a difference of 4,208 votes. In the cantons of Lucerne, Geneva and Vaud, which separately record votes from Swiss residents abroad, the initiative was rejected by 70 percent of Swiss Abroad voters or 4,031 votes. Assuming a similar voting pattern was followed in other cantons, Swiss voters abroad therefore played a decisive role in this referendum.

The political position of the OSA

Expressing satisfaction at the influence exerted by our 80,000 or more compatriots abroad who exercise their political rights, the CSA discussed the political role of the organisation in the run-up to the parliamentary elections this



imagopress/Patrick Lüthy

The Fifth Switzerland’s influence is becoming increasingly felt at home, OSA President Georg Stucky tells the CSA. Swiss voters abroad played a decisive role in the vote on the asylum initiative.

autumn. As representative and spokesman for the Fifth Switzerland, the OSA is playing an increasingly important though at the same time more demanding role.

Not at the Fifth Switzerland’s expense

During the discussion on the federal deficit and possible economising measures, the OSA expressed concern about possible budget cuts for Swiss schools abroad and other institutions such as swissinfo/SRI and Presence Switzerland.

The OSA reminded participants that the credit set aside for Swiss Presence’s activities abroad was relatively modest. According to the constitution, the government is committed to strengthening the ties of Swiss Abroad with each

other and with their home country. With this in mind it also supports organisations. The OSA warned against budget cuts at the expense of the Fifth Switzerland, which could well have a boomerang effect over the long term.

No reductions in consular network

The OSA expressed its opposition against any downsizing of the consular service, reminding members of the report on diplomatic and consular services published by the National Council’s supervising commission. Compared with many other countries, our country’s services are on the borderline of viability. The OSA is also opposed to lifting the obligation to register, which it believes is counter-productive and would complicate citizens’ relationships. Added to this,

the OSA spoke out against any reduction of Swiss representations abroad.

Dramatic situation in Argentina

Last year was overshadowed by the serious economic problems facing Swiss nationals resident in Argentina. According to the OSA, the situation of our compatriots who are insured under the voluntary AHV/IV is particularly worrying, since due to the economic and political crises these people are no longer in a position to pay their contributions and risk losing their insurance entitlement. The OSA has actively intervened in the endeavour to find a rapid solution to this problem.

OSA, Isabelle Schmidt-Duvoisin

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad – youth arrangements

It's not too late to register for the following packages.

Switzerland mobile – the mountains of the Valais
(10.8.–16.8.2003)

Age: 18–35
Cost: CHF 950.– (including accommodation, meals, rental of material, transport, organisation by OSA team leaders and a mountain guide).
Registration deadline: 1.7.2003

Stay with a host family:

Duration: 1–6 weeks according to preference
Location: throughout Switzerland (regional preferences will be taken into account if possible)
Age: 15–25
Cost: CHF 100.– per week plus the cost of a Swiss Pass (general pass for public transport) for two or four weeks: CHF 250.–/CHF 370.–.
Registration deadline: 6 weeks before stay.

Language study

Dates: 11.8.–22.8.2003
French course in Fribourg
5.1.–16.1.2004 German course in Berne
5.1.–16.1.2004 French course in Berne
Duration: 2 weeks, 40 lessons
Location: Berne/Fribourg
Age: as a rule 15–25 years
Accommodation: Host families
Cost: CHF 970.– (including language course, textbooks, Swiss Pass, stay with host family, excursions).
Registration deadline: 6 weeks before stay.

Switzerland, centre of education

Dates: 1.9.–14.2.2004
Duration: 2 weeks
Location: Zurich, Berne, Fribourg, Basle, St. Gall
Age: 15–25
Accommodation: Host families
Cost: CHF 680.– (including in-

roduction, advice and visits to educational institutions, Swiss Pass, accommodation with a host family).

Registration deadline: 6 weeks before stay.

Seminar on "Switzerland, Financial Centre: Accessible to Young Swiss Abroad?"

Dates: 24.8.–31.8.2003
Location: Zurich / Crans-Montana
Age: 16–25
Accommodation: host families/group accommodation.
Cost: CHF 620.– (including accommodation, excursions, workshop, Congress of the Swiss Abroad).
Registration deadline: 6.7.2003

Federal Youth Session

Date: scheduled for one week in November 2003
Location: Berne
Age: 15–21
Cost: CHF 100.– (administrative contribution)

Note: A good spoken understanding of a national language is required.
Registration deadline: 1.10.2003

New Year's ski camp

Dates: 26.12.2003–4.1.2004
Location: Torgon (Valais)
Age: 15–25
Cost: CHF 800.– (including board and lodging, ski pass, ski and snowboard instruction, organisation by OSA team).
Registration deadline: 10.11.2003

As usual, information and details on the above arrangements are available from:

Organisation for the Swiss Abroad
Youth Service, Alpenstr. 26, 3000 Berne 16
Tel.: ++41 (0)31 356 61 00
Fax: ++41 (0)31 356 61 01
youth@aso.ch, www.aso.ch

Translated from German.

For other youth packages see Dossier page 10.

Summer in Crans-Montana

The 81st Congress of the Swiss Abroad (to be held 29 to 31 August) will be discussing the importance of Switzerland as a financial centre. A perfect opportunity to enjoy the sun in Crans-Montana! Find out more by logging on to www.aso.ch.



ZVG