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Off to new horizons. Swiss Abroad Andrea Hunziker, who emigrated to Cyprus from Switzerland a year ago.

Survey shows that: Swiss Abroad are more open-minded

A representative survey has confirmed what the Council for the Swiss Abroad, the OSA's governing body, has always claimed: Swiss Abroad are more open-minded than Swiss at home and do not fit into any single political pigeonhole.

GABRIELLE KELLER

THIS REVELATION MUST HAVE put Swiss journalists who are fixated on right-left politics firmly in their place. Their much-loved cliché of a conservative, politically back-

ward-looking Fifth Switzerland could not be further from the truth. A survey conducted by the GfS research institute on behalf of the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad (OSA) and swissinfo/SRI negates any such preconceptions and shows the Fifth Switzerland in

its proper light. The results show that, while Swiss residents abroad feel close ties with Switzerland, this love of the home country is not to be confused with the patriotism which Swiss at home tend to equate with protectionism and isolationism. For example, Swiss Abroad clearly support Europe and are against toughening the asylum law.

Tipping the balance

This representative on-line survey was based on the 82,000 Swiss Abroad registered in Swiss electoral rolls. In all, 2003 registered Swiss Abroad with university-level educa-

tion took part. It is worth remembering that the Council for the Swiss Abroad has always issued its referendum recommendations in the interest of the Fifth Switzerland: proof positive that this governing body of the OSA deserves its unofficial title of "the parliament of the Fifth Switzerland". The results of the survey are unequivocal: Swiss citizens living abroad voted in favour of the solidarity fund, the liberalisation of the electricity market, and all pro-Europe proposals (European Economic Area, bilaterals etc.), and against the asylum initiative. Votes from Swiss Abroad even tipped the balance in the last referendum. This points to the importance which the Fifth Switzerland attaches to liberal attitudes and an open, reform-friendly state.

Opposites

Political views are generally categorised as right, left or centre. A distribution chart of political affiliations in Switzerland shows a marked concentration at the centre of the political spectrum, petering out at both ends. The opposite is true of Swiss Abroad: here the highest values are recorded at both ends of the spectrum, declining on both sides towards the centre (see diagram below). Or, as political scientist and Gfs Director Claude Longchamp put it at the presentation of the survey in Berne on 5 June: "Swiss Abroad of voting age are neither left-

wing nor right-wing, they are both: part of them is left and the other part is right." The magnetic pull that draws everything towards the centre does not exist to the same extent among Swiss voters abroad.

Less dogmatic

In terms of qualitative differences the study showed that Swiss voters resident abroad were less inclined to regard issues concerning Switzerland's openness to the world as a question of left, centre or right than their counterparts at home. The majority of left-wing voters at home and abroad voted in favour of the "Yes to Europe" initiative. The divergence between home and abroad is larger mainly at the centre and right of centre. Forty-six percent of right-wing voters resident abroad voted in favour of EU membership negotiations, as opposed to only 23 percent at home.

The SP stands to win

Which parties would be most likely to win the votes of Swiss Abroad at the National Council elections? According to the results of the survey, conducted in the spring of this year, the Social Democrats would scoop a 31 percent share of the votes. The Liberal Democrats would come second with an 18 percent share of Swiss Abroad votes, with third place being shared by the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and the Greens with 15 percent

each of the vote. In fifth place the CVP would gain eight percent of the vote, slightly ahead of Liberals with seven percent of the vote.

With around ten percent fewer votes from Swiss Abroad than from voters at home, the SVP would suffer the greatest loss. The Greens, on the other hand, would also be among the winners, gaining ten percent more votes from Swiss Abroad. The Social Democrats (SP) would gain seven percentage points and the Liberals five percent. The Liberal Democrats would lose one percent of the vote and the CVP six percent.

Market-driven

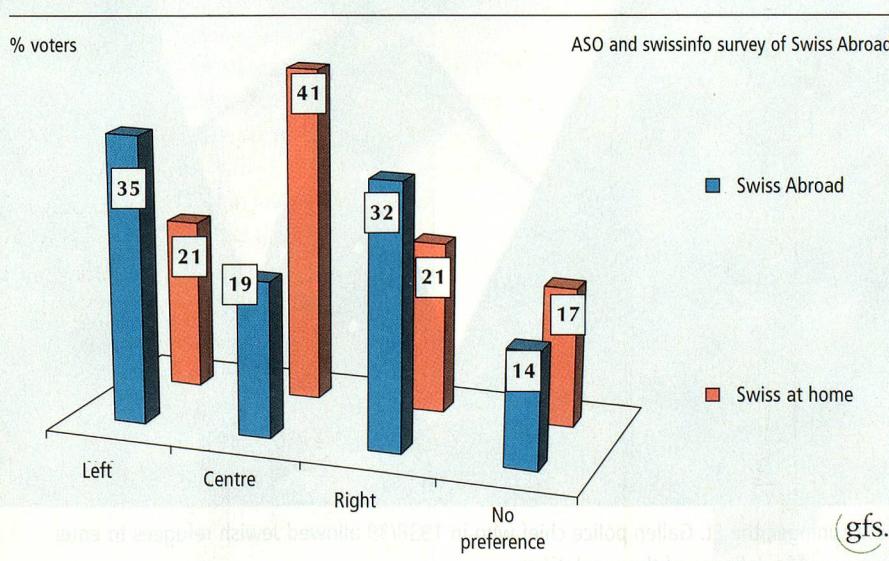
Some 58 percent of Swiss Abroad who took part in the survey expressed a wish for Switzerland to enter the EU by 2007. But roughly the same number want to keep banking secrecy. While the majority of respondents were highly market-driven, they nevertheless came out in favour of maximum support for Swiss, the troubled airline. Most Swiss Abroad do not want to reduce the number of refugees taken in. Sixty-nine percent favoured the introduction of electronic voting (e-voting).

In terms of image, our country comes out very well: 72 percent of respondents said they were well informed about life in Switzerland. And over 90 percent of Swiss Abroad say their image of Switzerland is good.

What are the wishes of the Fifth Switzerland? Swiss Abroad want Switzerland to adopt an open attitude to other countries, grant foreigners equal opportunities, be kind to Nature and modern in outlook, and base its policies on liberal economic principles.

Left v. Right

"Left, Right, Centre" are three terms often used to indicate political views.



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