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The election manifesto for the Swiss abroad

The Organisation for the Swiss Abroad represents the interests of fellow Swiss citizens living outside Switzerland. In view of the general elections taking place this autumn, the OSA is presenting the political parties and the relevant politicians with a list of concerns and wishes for the new legislative period. This election manifesto was agreed by the Council of the Swiss Abroad at its April 2006 session.

Politics

- Greater involvement of the Swiss abroad in political debates, especially during the opinion-forming phase, primarily within the framework of the international sections of the political parties as well as over the Internet.
- Promoting candidates from the Swiss abroad community for elections to Federal Council seats.
- Greater involvement of the Fifth Switzerland in the legislative procedure.
- The earliest possible introduction of electronic voting; including the Swiss abroad in future pilot testing.
- Simplifying the ability to exercise ones political rights from abroad, especially by centralising the electoral register for the Swiss abroad at cantonal level and scrapping the obligatory four-yearly renewal of voter registration.
- Ensuring that the Swiss abroad are kept adequately informed, especially through the further development of swissinfo/SRI and the expansion of the Swiss Review (increasing its size and frequency).



On the roof of the Federal Parliament building

Mobility

- Upholding, developing and implementing the Agreement on the Free Movement of People with European Union Member States and extending this free movement to countries that subsequently join the EU.
- Ensuring that the Swiss abroad are adequately represented by Swiss foreign missions by maintaining and where necessary expanding the network of consulates and securing the provision of high-quality services.
- Promoting and upgrading professional mobility, for instance within the framework of exchange programmes; recognizing the economic, political, cultural and social benefits of mobility for Switzerland.
- Facilitating mobility through the conclusion of international agreements, especially with regard to social security (e.g. with Australia and New Zealand), double taxation and the recognition of diplomas.
- Implementing the agreements that clear up the status of cross-border commuters

(e.g. the problems associated with unemployment insurance in Italy).

Education & training

- Maintaining and expanding the existing network of Swiss schools abroad in order to offer young foreign-resident Swiss citizens an opportunity to be educated to Swiss standards so that they can easily continue their education in Switzerland.
- Promoting collaboration between institutions other than the Swiss schools abroad which are nonetheless involved in educating young Swiss citizens, as well as supporting such institutions.
- Securing grants for young Swiss abroad to come to Switzerland to pursue their education/training.
- Extending the recognition of foreign diplomas in Switzerland and of Swiss diplomas abroad.

Switzerland's international presence

- Expanding the international presence and image of Switzer-

land abroad, amongst other things by developing the network of diplomatic and consular missions.

- Cooperating systematically with the Swiss abroad and their institutions, which given Switzerland's international presence increases the antenna and multiplier effect.
- Greater cooperation between and coordination of the various parties marketing the country abroad.
- Systematic consideration of the international consequences of national decisions and the effects statements have on perceptions and the image of Switzerland.
- Raising awareness among the Swiss people to global competition and promoting competitiveness within Switzerland.
- Using the infrastructures and network of Swiss schools abroad as platforms for Switzerland's international presence; founding new Swiss schools in countries like China, India and Russia.



Maintaining contact with the motherland

- Promoting and supporting programmes that encourage dialogue between the Swiss abroad and both their home country and Swiss citizens living in Switzerland (e.g. through holiday camps for foreign-resident Swiss children).
- Improving the legal status of state-recognised institutions for the Swiss abroad in accordance with Art. 40 of the Federal Constitution, in particular replacing the decree on financial support for Swiss abroad institutions (which expires on 31 December 2007) with a federal law.

Political lobbying for the Swiss abroad

The SP parliamentary group has put forward no fewer than three political initiatives for the benefit of the Swiss abroad. These will soon be considered in Parliament.

SP National Councillor Mario Fehr wants the Federal Council to create the necessary constitutional and legislative conditions to allow direct representation of the Swiss abroad in the Federal Assembly. There are good grounds for his proposal. By the end of 2006, a total of 111,249 foreign-resident Swiss citizens had registered to exercise their political rights in Switzerland. This makes them a very powerful force that should be given a stronger voice in political debate in Switzerland. Several countries give their foreign-resident citizens separate representation in parliament. For example, Portuguese citizens temporarily or permanently living abroad can elect four deputies by postal voting. Italy's expatriates choose six of the seats in the Senate and

THE OSA'S POSITION

Compared with the foreign-resident citizens of other countries, the Swiss abroad have a high degree of political codetermination rights. However, the importance of the Swiss Diaspora for Switzerland as a whole continues to be underestimated at home. There is therefore a need to strengthen the means whereby the specific needs of the Fifth Switzerland are met and their presence is taken into account.

The OSA has always striven to give the Swiss abroad the same status as their domestic compatriots wherever possible. It has consistently campaigned for equality and against the discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation of expatriates in all the relevant areas. For this reason, it supports all suggestions that qualify individual political codetermination in favour of institutionalising a collective special position. Furthermore, sufficient attention must be paid to achieving systemic conformity within the constitutional framework of Switzerland. Finally, it would be politically wise to carefully gauge what Swiss-resident citizens think of the idea of granting expatriates decision-making and codetermination rights.

12 of those in the House of Representatives. Mario Fehr believes that the opinions and interests of the Swiss abroad could be better represented and more directly tied into the political process by giving foreign-resident Swiss citizens two seats on the Council of States and as many as six extra representatives on the National Council.

Councillor Fehr also wants all cantons to allow the Swiss abroad to vote in small-chamber elections. At present, the Swiss abroad are excluded from choosing councillors of state in most cantons because small-chamber elections are cantonal.

Carlo Sommaruga from Geneva proposes amending the Constitution and all the other relevant legislation so that the Swiss abroad can be represented first on the Council of States and later on the Federal Council in the manner that best suits our institutions. There are several ways in which this could be made possible: either through regional elections (as the 27th canton) or by choosing Swiss abroad representatives through an electoral college.

Outgoing National Councillor Remo Gysin, who is also the chairman of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, would like the Federal Council to conduct and publish the findings of a statistical analysis of the voting patterns of the Swiss abroad during referenda and elections. Foreign-resident Swiss citizens can currently participate in referenda and elections in only five cantons: Appenzell Innerrhoden, Basel City, Geneva, Lucerne and Vaud.

The Swiss abroad parliamentary group

The Swiss abroad community is constantly growing. If they were a canton, the 645,000 foreign-resident Swiss men and women scattered around the globe would be Switzerland's third-largest; less populated than Zurich and Berne, but with more inhabitants than Vaud canton.

Encouragingly, the rise in the number of Swiss abroad is exceeded by the rate of growth in the number of registered voters. Whereas only 105,000 people had registered to exercise

their political rights in Switzerland just a year ago, the figure now stands at 111,000. When the Swiss abroad were granted the right to vote and take part in referenda 15 years ago, no more than 20-25,000 potential votes were expected to come from abroad.

Switzerland's politicians are increasingly taking note of this, and taking an ever-greater interest in the situation and needs of their internationally mobile compatriots. This "prise de conscience" with respect to the significance of foreign-resident Swiss citizens led to the creation of the Swiss abroad parliamentary group two years ago. This brings together more than 80 members of the National Council and the Council of States – fully a third of the National Assembly – all of whom have indicated a specific interest in the needs of the Fifth Switzerland by joining the group.

Since then, this interest in the Swiss abroad has expressed itself in a number of parliamentary initiatives:

Swiss schools abroad: Together with no fewer than 45 co-signatories, Genevan SNP National Councillor André Reymond, a member of the Council for the Swiss Abroad, tabled a parliamentary question asking the Federal Council to explain the importance of Swiss schools abroad in enhancing the perception of Switzerland and outline the support that the state would be willing to give to set up new schools in up-and-coming countries like China, India and Russia. In its answer, the Federal Council stated that Swiss schools abroad enjoyed an excellent reputation, were extremely well known and provided Switzerland with a lasting and wide-ranging net-



work of contacts around the world. The government would be pleased if new schools were established, and would gladly provide advice. However, the initiative should be taken by the Swiss abroad themselves.

Dual German-Swiss nationality agreement: Following discussions within the board of the OSA during last year's Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Basel, National Councillor Remo Gysin (SP/BS) tabled a parliamentary question asking when the national government planned to ratify the agreement that it had signed with Germany several years ago on national service for dual citizens. This clearly prompted the Federal Council into action, and it said the agreement would soon be put to Parliament for approval. The assembly would discuss the bill at its autumn or winter session.

Health insurance for the Swiss abroad: CSA member and Vaud FDP National Councillor Yves Guisan and 47 co-signatories proposed a motion to assess the way health insurance contributions paid by Swiss

citizens living within the EU are calculated, and the right to choose where to seek treatment.

Cross-border commuters and unemployment insurance: Councillor of State Filippo Lombardi, another member of the CSA, tabled a question on the problem of discrimination against Swiss cross-border commuters by Italian unemployment insurance regulations. In this he urged the Federal Council to apply to the Italian government or the relevant bodies at the European Union to ensure that Swiss cross-border commuters who lose their jobs are treated the same as their Italian counterparts, as required by the Agreement on the Free Movement of People signed by Switzerland and the EU.

E-voting: In the wake of a meeting of the parliamentary group, SP National Councillor Susanne Leutenegger Oberholzer (Basel Land) tabled a motion demanding the rapid introduction of e-voting and the involvement of the Swiss abroad in future pilot

testing. In parallel to this, the OSA approached the cantons to encourage them to introduce e-voting as quickly as possible.

In its reply, the Federal Council pointed out that the nationwide introduction of e-voting in all 2700 communities was very complex and time-consuming and that it would require changing cantonal legislation through referenda in most instances. The introduction of e-voting had to be dealt with carefully, it added, and it could not give any definite introduction date. For this reason, the Federal Council asked for Ms Leutenegger Oberholzer's motion to be rejected.

The issue had already been raised during parliamentary question time, when National Councillors Markus Hutter (FDP/ZH) and Yves Guisan (FDP/VD), referred to a newspaper interview in which the head of the political rights section of the Federal Chancellery had espoused the view that e-voting would not be introduced for another 30 years. In reply, Federal Chancellor Annemarie Huber-Hotz said that the cantonal and national parliaments would need to make time-consuming legislative and probably also constitutional changes before e-voting could be introduced for referenda, elections, the signing of initiatives and other votes. However, she said that the introduction of e-voting for referenda was the top priority. The ball was now in the cantons' court, with the National Council supporting the issue.

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad Winter 2007/2008

Whether your children are skiers or snowboarders, beginners or experts, our winter camps offer a great opportunity for 8- to 14-year-olds to have a super holiday!

Winter camp in Lantsch (GR)

Date: Thursday 27 December 2007 to Saturday 5 January 2008. *Number of places:* 48 *Cost:* CHF 900 (excl. ski and snowboard hire) *Registration deadline:* 15 October 2007

Winter camp in Flumserberg (SG)

Date: Saturday 2 February to Saturday 9 February 2008 *Number of places:* 24. *Cost:* CHF 700 (excl. ski and snowboard hire). *Registration deadline:* 15 December 2007

Twenty places for the youth ski camp in Lenk on 2-9 January 2008 will be given away. Application forms for participation in the draw will be available at www.aso.ch in September.

Registration

Discounts are available in justifiable cases. Precise details on the winter camps and application forms will be available at www.aso.ch (under "Youth", "Discover Switzerland", "Holiday camps") from September 2007 onwards. On request, we can also send you our information brochure by post.

ORGANISATION OF THE SWISS ABROAD

Our services:

- Legal Department
- Youth Service
- Association for the Promotion of Education for Young Swiss Abroad (AJAS)
- Committee for Swiss Schools Abroad (CSSA)
- Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA)

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