

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 34 (2007)
Heft: 5

Rubrik: OSA news

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85th Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Geneva

Micheline Calmy-Rey: "You are important bridge-builders"

Federal President Micheline Calmy-Rey's address to the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Geneva received rapturous applause. She urged the Swiss abroad to spread Switzerland's humanitarian tradition around the world. The Congress was held between 17 and 19 August under the motto: "United and committed – the Swiss on humanitarian missions". Jacques-Simon Eggly was elected president of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA).



Federal President Micheline Calmy-Rey with the incoming and outgoing OSA presidents, Jacques-Simon Eggly (left) and Georg Stucky (right).

The Federal President stressed the importance of the Fifth Switzerland and declared, "We are proud of our diaspora. You are important bridge-builders in all corners of the globe." After her address, Ms. Calmy-Rey answered questions from the floor and spoke in favour of introducing e-voting as soon as possible. The Federal President then spoke to young foreign-resident Swiss nationals about international politics and Switzerland's humanitarian missions.

The first to address the congress topic was Jakob Kellenberger, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross. He pointed out that the ICRC was steadily growing; a regrettable indication of the state of the world.

The speech by Aline Rebeaud, who founded the Maison Chance in Vietnam for the care of disabled orphans, attracted great interest.

A panel discussion entitled "Humanitarian Aid: Partners or Competitors?" was held between Walter Fust (director of the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development), Peter Brey (general secretary of the Terre des Hommes Foundation), Isabelle Ségui-Bitz (president of Médecins Sans Frontières) and Hans Lunshof of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

More than 500 foreign-resident Swiss nationals attended this year's congress in Geneva. On Saturday afternoon and Sunday, congress participants had an opportunity to visit var-

ious humanitarian organisations to whom Geneva plays host. On the Saturday afternoon, Swiss nationals from around the world enjoyed a gala dinner on Lake Geneva aboard the "Lausanne".

At the Friday session, the Council of the Swiss Abroad elected its vice-president, Jacques-Simon Eggly, the retiring Liberal National Councilor for Geneva, to succeed Georg Stucky as OSA president. The Council also petitioned the Federal Council for an increase in the loan for Swiss schools abroad.

The next Congress of the Swiss Abroad will be held in Fribourg from 22 to 24 August, 2008.

Swiss schools promote Switzerland

SI. Every year, directors of Swiss schools abroad return to their home country for a three-day conference in order to exchange ideas and discuss their concerns, which are mainly of a financial nature.

These schools are also feeling the effects of the Government's cost-cutting policy, since only a third of their funds are covered by the home country. "Financial analysis", "Best practice", "Payroll costs" and "Benchmarking": the programme organised by the Conference of Swiss Schools Abroad, which was held in Liestal (Baselland), sounds more like a seminar for corporate executives. As in previous years, discussions were chaired by a business consultant. This should come as no surprise, since schools are largely private enterprises despite the fact that Berne provides around 30 percent to their budget. Since financial

aid from the government is steadily declining (dropping by 12 percent between 2004 and 2007), the schools are obliged to optimise their business management and find new sources of cash. "This year we needed CHF 17.5 million, whereas last year we had access to just on CHF 17 million," says Derrick Widmer, President of the Committee of Swiss Schools Abroad (CSSA). He emphasises "the importance of these schools for Switzerland's cultural image and presence abroad". Swiss schools can be found on four continents: six in Europe, one in Africa, two in Asia and seven in Latin America. In all, they are attended by about 6,500 pupils, mostly from kindergarten through to school-leaving age. The schools receive a total of CHF 17 million each year from the government, equivalent to roughly 30 percent of their budget. Several cantons act as patrons, sponsoring the schools by providing teaching support, some of the teaching materials, and often also by making a financial contribution.

Extraordinary merger

J.H. Two civic associations, the New Helvetic Society and Swiss Encounters, have merged to create a new society called Rencontres Suisse – Nouvelle Société Helvétique.

The New Helvetic Society (NSH) was founded in 1914 amid concerns that differences of opinion between German- and French-speaking Swiss would jeopardise the country's internal peace. The NSH was created as the successor to the Helvetic Society, which between 1760 and 1858 was in-



strumental in consolidating the Confederation and creating the federal state in 1848. The NSH was involved in the foundation of various national institutions whose aim was to promote relations between the Swiss abroad and the Swiss at home. This included the Swiss Abroad Commission (1917) and the Swiss Abroad Secretariat (1919). Only in 1989 did the OSA become an independent foundation on whose supervising bodies the NSH was represented in accordance with the statutes, while the director of the OSA in turn sat on the central board of the NSH.

Swiss Encounters (Rencontres Suisses) was founded in 1945 with similar objectives to the NSH: to promote national understanding through dialogue between the different language regions, social partners and generations, and between rural and urban areas. In 1999, Swiss Encounters merged with a younger organisation, Agir Pour Demain, to create Rencontres Suisses – Treffpunkt Schweiz (RS-TS).

The reasons behind the merger on 1 January 2007 were self-evident: both organisations pursued similar objectives. They canvassed the same target public, appealed to the same potential sponsors and donors for financial support, and both had trouble finding new young members. By pooling its human and financial resources, the new association will be better able to achieve the goals of its predecessors, the NSH and RS-TS. Christiane Langenberger, state councillor for Vaud, is the first president of the new organisation. Her vice-president, Philippe Lévy, a former ambassador, will remain a member of the OSA board and the Council of the Swiss Abroad until the 2009 elections. The same

applies to the other NSH representatives on the Council.
www.dialoguesuisse.ch
E-mail: rsnsb@bluewin.ch

Contacts in every corner of the globe – young Swiss abroad

Young Swiss abroad enjoy their stay in the Alps: an environment that not everyone is familiar with, but that everyone craves. Fancy a breath of alpine air?

More than 120 young Swiss attended the two summer camps held this year in La Punt in the Engadine, where they enjoyed a range of alpine activities such as hiking, mountain biking, swimming in an alpine lake, and cross-country treks. They forged contacts with young Swiss from all over the world and returned home with lasting impressions and hopefully a little nostalgia for the Swiss mountains.

Lively winter sports camp

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) wants to give more young people the chance to experience Switzerland. The 2007/08 winter programme offers an opportunity to indulge in winter sports in some of Switzerland's renowned ski resorts and enjoy a colourful, upbeat atmosphere with people from all corners of the globe. The OSA looks forward to welcoming you to Switzerland:

New Year ski camp in Sedrun (GR)

27.12.2007 – 5.1.2008
A camp for about 60 young Swiss abroad. Sedrun has been welcoming young

Swiss abroad for years. And the feedback from participants is extremely positive.

Sign up now!

Winter sports week in Langwies/Arosa (GR)

23.2. – 1.3.2008

The winter sports week is being held in the Schanfigg for the first time. Open to young adults age 18 and upwards. This camp has always had a unique atmosphere!

Easter camp in Fiesch (VS)

22.3. – 29.3.2008

Enjoy spring sunshine and take advantage of tips from qualified OSA snowboard and ski instructors. The camp is organised for two age groups.

Planning to study in Switzerland?

If you're interested in further training or education, this is the place for information and advice. The OSA endeavours to meet your individual needs and study requirements. But the emphasis is also on fun. After all, it's also your vacation. For information on our language courses, education arrangements or stays with host families go to www.aso.ch, "Offers" or contact *Organisation of the Swiss Abroad*
Youth Service
Tel.: +41 31 356 6100
youth@aso.ch

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad

Winter 2007/2008 camp for 8- to 14-year-olds

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 camps 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

Registration:

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

Swiss Ski

Free youth camp for 13- and 14-year-old Swiss children and the young Swiss abroad.

Twenty Swiss abroad children born in 1993 or 1994 as well as 280 children living in Switzerland will be offered free places at the major Swiss Ski Association ski camp in Lenk on 2–9 January 2008. Swiss abroad children interested in taking part in the youth skiing camp *must be able to communicate in at least one of the three Swiss national languages (German, French and Italian).*

The names of the lucky participants will be drawn out of the hat in mid-October. Registration for the draw: www.aso.ch (under "Offers").

Please return the completed form by 15 October 2007 to: Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad

*Alpenstrasse 26
CH-3006 Berne
Tel.: +41 31 356 6116
Fax: +41 31 356 6101
E-mail: sjas@aso.ch*