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The Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) makes its voice heard

The "Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland" met for its spring session on 12 April in Berne's city hall. The political representation of the Swiss abroad and the challenges facing the OSA under the leadership of its new president, Jacques-Simon Eggly, were on the agenda.

Jacques-Simon Eggly, head of the OSA since August 2007, explained the strategic direction in which he wants to take the organisation under his presidency. He emphasised the importance of political neutrality when outlining the role of the OSA.

While the number of Swiss abroad is increasing year on year, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) is under enormous pressure to reduce its spending. The Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) is well aware of this situation, but at the same time is concerned about the closure of a number of consulate offices. In the event of an unavoidable consulate closure, the OSA would like to see the establishment of an honorary Swiss consulate supported by the FDFA and the local Swiss community as compensation.

Future of Swiss schools

The members of the Council of the Swiss Abroad made their position clear on the financing of Swiss schools abroad in a resolution. The CSA believes that the existence of Swiss schools abroad would be jeopardised if financial contributions from fed-

eral government, approved by Federal Councillors last December, were reduced again. The OSA is vehemently opposed to such a step. After all, it would be showing complete disregard for the will of Parliament, which approved financing to the sum of CHF 20 million.

Direct representation of the Swiss abroad

The Council of the Swiss Abroad discussed a motion and a parliamentary initiative for the direct representation of the Swiss abroad in the Swiss Parliament, which were submitted in June 2007. National Councillor Carlo Sommaruga (SP/GE) explained his parliamentary initiative which provides for direct representation of the Swiss abroad in both the National

Council and the Council of States. The OSA has filed an application to be heard by the examining committee. The position of the CSA is based on the special characteristics of Switzerland: the system of direct democracy where citizens are frequently called to vote, and the federal structure where every citizen votes in his canton (which also applies to the Swiss abroad). For this reason, the CSA has decided to focus on stepping up cooperation between the FDFA and the OSA, enhancing the presence and profile of the Swiss abroad, promoting the political participation of the individual Swiss abroad and increasing influence ("Swiss Abroad" parliamentary group – CSA – electoral participation of Swiss abroad).

The distribution of seats on the Council of the Swiss Abroad – new ruling

The distribution of seats on the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) was last reviewed in 1989. Since then various selective amendments have been made. Changes are now necessary again, as the Swiss Pro Patria Foundation and the New Helvetic Society have renounced their right to representation on the CSA. With the new appointment of the Council for the term of office from 2009, the size of the Council will be reduced and the proportion of Swiss abroad increased. All Council members should in future have the same status. The following key review principles have been established:

- Revocation of proxy representation
- Fixed number of 140 members
- Ratio of outside Switzerland to inside Switzerland 6:1 (120 members from abroad, 20 members from Switzerland)
- Ratio of Europe to outside Europe 1:1 (60 from Europe, 60 from outside Europe)

Election of a new Board member

The Council had a choice between two serving politicians in the election of a new OSA Executive Board member: National Councillor Thérèse Meyer-Kaelin (CVP) and National Councillor Hans Kaufmann (SVP) put themselves forward for election. Thérèse Meyer-Kaelin, the founding president of the "Swiss Abroad" parliamentary group, was elected.

With the Swiss Club of Northern Nevada, the large family of Swiss associations has gained a new member.



Berne's city hall ...



... was the venue for the meeting of the Council of the Swiss Abroad.

Congress of the Swiss Abroad 2008: from 22 to 24 August in Fribourg

What experiences have Swiss people abroad had with the free movement of people? What do they think of Switzerland's accession to the Schengen area? How do they see the debate in Switzerland from outside? The 86th Congress of the Swiss Abroad, entitled "Switzerland without borders?", will focus on these topical issues. It will take place between 22 and 24 August in the Forum Fribourg congress centre.

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) is once again expecting several hundred people from all over the world to take part in the 86th Congress of the Swiss Abroad. Federal Councillor Moritz Leuenberger will attend the plenary session on the Saturday as an honorary guest, and will give a speech to the congress participants. He will then answer questions from young Swiss people abroad. The venue is the Forum Fribourg congress centre (www.forum-fribourg.ch).

Swiss accession to the Schengen area is a big issue for the Swiss abroad. What would happen to Switzerland if it opened up its borders and discarded border controls? What if it isolated itself from Europe? There is actually going to be an optional referendum on the definitive introduction of the free movement of people. The 670,000 or so Swiss residing abroad are following developments at home with a close eye. Working across borders, being a foreigner and looking for work as a foreigner are all issues that the congress participants will be familiar with from their own



The next Congress of the Swiss Abroad will be held in the beautiful city of Fribourg.

experiences. Their country's future concerns them, whether they themselves currently live within or outside the Schengen area. Experts will debate the background to the Schengen Agreement and the free movement of people at this year's congress. The Swiss abroad will have the opportunity to share their own experiences and get answers to the questions they have in three workshops.

The Canton of Fribourg's history of migration makes this year's venue especially appropriate. In 1818, at least 300 families left the canton, where people were starving, to establish a new home in Brazil. They founded the town of Nova Friburgo, which today has 180,000 inhabitants, in the state of Rio de Janeiro. An impressive photographic exhibition at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad will show various aspects of the new home of these Swiss migrants.

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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For organisational reasons, the registration deadline for the congress is the end of June. All documents, including the registrations form, can be found at www.aso.ch.

Youth seminar at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad

The Swiss abroad will look at the position of Switzerland in Europe at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad from 22 to 24 August. Switzerland's relationship with the EU has changed in recent years and exciting, current issues such as the extension of the free movement of people are on the agenda. Will we have a Switzerland without borders in future?

Young Swiss people abroad often live in very different worlds. Many are born abroad as Swiss citizens. It is the young people in Europe who

benefit most from the free movement of people. They can look for a job or study anywhere in Europe. The younger generation take mobility for granted.

The bilateral agreements give the Swiss in Europe the same mobility as EU citizens. What are the experiences of young Swiss people abroad in Europe? How do young Swiss people abroad outside of Europe view mobility? The younger generation will have the opportunity to express their views at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad.

The youth seminar "Switzerland without borders?" begins on 17 August in Berne, where the participants will meet their Swiss host families. The OSA will give the Swiss abroad an introduction to the topic of "Switzerland and Europe" between Monday and Thursday. The young participants will learn about Switzerland's policy on Europe, attend workshops on European cooperation and hold a debate, with speakers for and against, on the opening-up of Switzerland to Europe.

An attractive fringe programme will ensure plenty of opportunity for relaxation and entertainment. The OSA would like to give the young people a chance to get to know the cities of Berne and Fribourg.

The young participants will be actively involved in the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Fribourg. Federal Councillor Moritz Leuenberger will spend time with them and answer their questions. The group will spend the last few nights of their stay in Fribourg youth hostel. Young Swiss people from all over the world are welcome to take part in this informative and enjoyable seminar.