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86th Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Fribourg

Swiss Review – protest against budget cuts

Federal Councillor Moritz Leuenberger called for a Switzerland open to the outside world, responsible citizenship and respect for minority groups at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad. The theme of the congress were the opportunities and risks presented by the free movement of people.

The day before, the Council of the Swiss Abroad had opposed the cost-saving measures proposed by the federal government in relation to "Swiss Review" and called on the cantons to speed up the introduction of e-voting.

At the end of Federal Councillor Leuenberger's 1 August speech to the Swiss abroad in 2001, contemporary alpenhorn music was played instead of the traditional sounding of church bells. There were complaints from all over the world. "So, it occurred to me that the Swiss abroad are very conservative." He began to question this when he read that the congress would be addressing the question of "Switzerland without borders." He said: "Every child can say 'No' before he or she learns to say 'Mummy', 'Daddy' and 'car'. Borders define the identity not just of individuals, but also of communities." However, "no country or individual in the world is completely independent. Co-dependence is a fact of life. We cannot even produce our national sausage on our own". Leuenberger was referring to the import ban on bovine intestines from Brazil. He added: "Cows' intestines from Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay have ended the national Cervelat crisis."

On the previous day, the Council of the Swiss Abroad had come out in favour of extending the free movement of people to Rumania and Bulgaria. Leuenberger was pleased with their position and was confident that the majority of Swiss people would also back the proposal. Leuenberger's speech marked the official close of the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Fribourg. Participants had previ-

ously taken part in workshops and a panel discussion with politicians on the opportunities and risks presented by the bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the EU.

The "Parliament" of the Swiss abroad opposed the cost-saving measures proposed by the federal government in relation to "Swiss Review". It also called on the cantons to speed up the introduction of e-voting for Swiss people abroad.

To underline its concerns, the Council of the Swiss Abroad approved two petitions in Fribourg. One unanimously approved resolution opposed future restrictions on the postal delivery of "Swiss Review". The second resolution concerned a previous demand on the part of the Council, namely for the introduction of electronic voting for referenda and elections as soon as possible.

"Swiss Review" currently has a budget of CHF 1.8 million. The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) wants to cut funding by half a million francs from 2009. 70% of the publication's budget is spent on delivery costs. The FDFA argues that "Swiss Review" should therefore only be sent to those people who expressly request it in paper form. Everyone else would receive it by e-mail, which would save on costs.

One key issue here concerns those recipients who do not respond to the proposed measures. They would no longer receive "Swiss Review". Jacques-Simon Eggly, President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, said it was a "renunciation of the principle that all Swiss people abroad have the right to information whether it is of interest to them or not". Eggly said it was "paradoxical" that "at a time when the community of Swiss people abroad is growing there are plans to cut our resources". He reminded everyone about the closure of consulates in Europe and the uncertainty surround-

Young Swiss abroad after the discussion with Federal Councillor Leuenberger and OSA Director Wyder (left), Leuenberger with OSA President Jacques-Simon Eggly (below) and National Council members Schwander and Markwalder during the panel discussion.



ing the future of Swiss schools abroad. "Swiss Review" costs have already been reduced by around CHF 300,000. He added: "We are not opposed to an electronic edition, but only those who expressly want it should receive it."

During the discussion, many speakers described "Swiss Review" as an "institution" that provides a "vital link between Swiss abroad and their home country". Other arguments were that not everyone abroad has Internet access and a printed version of the magazine is read by all family members.

Eggly concluded by expressing his hope that there was still "scope for discussion with the FDFA". If not, the plans would be "contested in Parliament". Eggly highlighted an "air of positivity" after the presentations by Vice Chancellor Thomas Helbling and Neuchâtel State Chancellor Jean-Marie Reber on the progress being made with e-voting for Swiss abroad.

Helbling explained that the cantons that want to carry out trials with e-voting now have until 30 June 2009 to adapt the electoral register for Swiss abroad. The federal government welcomed the introduction of e-voting, and the ball was now in the cantons' court.

Reber reported on the experiences of the Canton of Neuchâtel, one of three Swiss cantons to have already trialled e-voting. On 1 June, Neuchâtel carried out a trial with the participation of

Swiss abroad for the first time. The trial was extremely successful technically and in terms of the level of participation: 10% of the electronic voters were Swiss abroad.

The next Congress of the Swiss Abroad will take place in Lucerne from 7 to 9 August 2009.



Council of the Swiss Abroad elections

Council of the Swiss Abroad elections for the 2009–2013 term of office will be held over the coming months. The distribution of seats was reorganised last April. More countries than before now have a fixed entitlement to seats. The differentiation between delegates and representatives has been removed to provide for this. All delegates will enjoy the same status in future, enhancing the standing of individual mandates.

Who is entitled to a seat on the Council of the Swiss Abroad? Every Swiss community with at least 1,000 registered members will be entitled to a seat. The remaining seats will then be distributed to the countries with the largest Swiss communities.

Who elects the members of the Council? All registered Swiss people who live in a country entitled to a seat can participate in the election of the Council, as either a candidate or a voter. This will be organised by the recognised Swiss associations and their parent organisations or,

where these do not exist, by OSA.

Who can stand as a candidate? All Swiss citizens abroad can stand as a candidate or nominate candidates.

Who organises the elections? OSA is hereby announcing the new elections for the Council of the Swiss Abroad

worldwide. The parent organisations and associations eligible to vote will be responsible for organising the elections.

How can Swiss people abroad find out about their entitlement to vote? Through "Swiss Review". Further information can be found on our website www.aso.ch.

OSA will write directly to all parent organisations and associations eligible to vote.

When will the elections take place? Between autumn 2008 and summer 2009. The newly-elected Council will hold its constitutive meeting in Lucerne on 7 August 2009.

AJAS: Advice on education in Switzerland

Each year, many young Swiss people abroad opt for an education in their country of origin. Integrating into the Swiss education system is not always easy for them, perhaps because their language skills are not so good, or because their previous education is not recognised or because they are not aware of the many educational opportunities available. The Association for the Promotion of Education for Young Swiss Abroad (AJAS) provides support and advice for young Swiss people abroad on matters concerning education in Switzerland and is able to look into each person's individual situation.

In 2007, AJAS answered over 700 initial enquiries from countries all over the world. Most were queries about how education could be financed, others were mainly general questions on education in Switzerland. In 2007, AJAS handled around





120 grant applications from young Swiss people abroad to their home cantons and discussed many other forms of educational funding in addition to the cantonal grants. Representing the interests of young Swiss abroad is a key part of AJAS' work. Further information on the association's activities and the impressions of young Swiss people abroad in education in Switzerland can be found in our latest annual report, which can be ordered from AJAS or viewed on the Internet at www.ajas.ch.

AJAS' services are free of charge and could not be provided without the financial support of third parties. AJAS is principally financed by contributions from the Swiss Confederation. However, the association also receives private support from companies, foundations and individuals. AJAS received a significant contribution from the Jacobs Foundation this year, enabling it to reprint its flyers and maintain its services to the full. We would like to thank the Jacobs Foundation and all our other sponsors, donors and patrons. If you would also like to support the association and its advisory work, please contact us at the address below. AJAS and the young Swiss people abroad in education in Switzerland are grateful for your help.

AJAS

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Holidays and educational trips for young Swiss abroad

More than 200 young Swiss people abroad enjoyed an exciting stay in their second homeland this summer. The enthusiastic visitors got to know Switzerland well, made contacts with Swiss people living in Switzerland and abroad and took unforgettable memories home with them. OSA looks forward to welcoming old and new faces to its forthcoming winter programme.

The OSA summer programme started off with a workshop on Euro 2008. The Swiss abroad were close to the action at the biggest football tournament ever held in Switzerland.

Participants took the opportunity to improve their knowledge of one of the Swiss national languages at courses in Berne, Zurich, Lausanne and Fribourg. A group looked at Switzerland's position within Europe at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad. All these young people stayed with a Swiss host family during their visit.

The traditional summer camps were also a great success. Two groups each made up of 60 young people from over 25 countries met in Flumserbergen. The main aim was to give them the opportunity to get to know Switzerland and other Swiss people abroad from all over the world as well as the chance to participate in sport, excursions and creative workshops.

For the first time, a group attended a summer camp in August organised in cooperation with the charitable

Women's Association. The young people helped renovate hiking routes and mountain paths as well as sports and play facilities in Saas Balen in Valais.

Register now for OSA's winter programme!

OSA would like to provide even more young people with happy memories of Switzerland. The 2008/09 winter programme provides the opportunity to practise winter sports in well-known Swiss holiday destinations.

New Year's ski camp in Lantsch / Lenzerheide (Grisons)

(15 to 25-year-olds)

26.12.08–4.1.09

Snow sports week in Wengen (Berne)

(18-year-olds and above)

28.2.09–7.3.09

Easter sports camp in Langwies / Arosa (Grisons)

(14 to 25-year-olds)

5.4.09–13.4.09

Language courses will be held in Berne and Fribourg between 5.1.09 and 16.1.09.

More information on the various offers is available at www.aso.ch under "Offers". OSA would also be happy to send you its brochure

containing all its offers for young people, on request.

Youth Service

Tel: +41 31 356 61 00

youth@aso.ch, www.aso.ch

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad

Winter camp 2008/2009 for 8 to 14-year-olds

Places are still available for our winter camp in Unterwasser! Whether they are skiers or snowboarders, beginners or at an advanced level, young Swiss people abroad aged 8 to 14 will have a great time at our winter camps.

Winter camp Unterwasser (St.Gallen)

Date: Saturday, 31 January to Saturday, 7 February 2009

No. of participants: 24

Cost: CHF 700

(excl. ski and snowboard hire)

Registration deadline:

15 December 2008

Registration

Reduced contribution rates are granted in just cases. More details on the winter camps and the registration form can be found at www.aso.ch (rubric: Offers / Offers for Children and Young People / Camps and offers / Holiday camps and travel). Our information brochure is also available by post on request.

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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