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Policy on Swiss abroad needs a legal framework

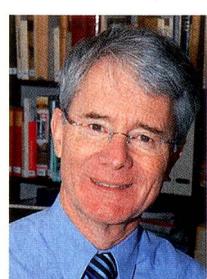
WITHIN THE SPACE OF A FEW MONTHS, Switzerland's councils have managed to approve a proposal to examine direct representation for Swiss people abroad in Parliament, to drastically cut the budget for providing information to Swiss expatriates and, just days later, to establish "Swiss Review" in law. Two steps forward, one step back. Yes to the objective, but no to the cost. Inconsistency in the extreme.

The reduction in the budget for "Swiss Review" on the initiative of the FDFA is painful. Not just because the publisher, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), is suddenly faced with a budgetary shortfall of half a million francs, but even more so because this severe course of action raises doubts about awareness in the federal capital Berne of the role played by "Swiss Review" and about how serious people are about recognising the Fifth Switzerland.

"Swiss Review" is the only publication to reach all Swiss citizens registered with representations abroad. It keeps you, the reader, up to date with news about your rights and obligations. "Swiss Review" is your Official Journal. It also has the task of providing you with information to make it easier for you to exercise your political rights in Switzerland. "Swiss Review" also seeks to convey a current and diverse impression of Switzerland. And it serves as an information channel for embassies, consulates and Swiss associations.

OSA is a fierce proponent of the principle that everyone registered with a representation should continue to receive this basic information in future. However, the budget cuts are forcing us to take drastic measures. Postal costs make up the largest item of expenditure.

From this moment onwards, you will find a new online version at www.revue.ch that is the same as the printed copy. We would really appreciate it if Internet users could start using the online version and waive their right to a postal copy of "Swiss Review" from now on. On page 12, we explain how you can register to do this. We are also making a renewed appeal to families who receive several copies of "Swiss Review" to cancel superfluous issues by notifying their consular representation.



Rudolf Wyder

This should result in a significant fall in postal costs in the medium term. Unfortunately, though, in 2009, this will not be sufficient to offset the reduction in the budget. It therefore seems inevitable that "Swiss Review" will have to be published at less regular intervals.

Despite this major setback, Switzerland still does more for its citizens abroad than most other countries. In typically Swiss fashion, this support is distributed among government and non-government organisations, but with no overall strategy. It is based on practical cooperation between the authorities and private organisations, principally OSA. Even though there is a constitutional obligation to foster relations between Swiss people abroad and promote an affiliation with Switzerland, there is no legal framework to define the principles of policy on Swiss citizens abroad, the status of the institutions of the Fifth Switzerland or the corresponding resources. It is high time a federal law was created relating to the Swiss abroad.

RUDOLF WYDER, OSA DIRECTOR, PUBLISHER OF "SWISS REVIEW"

IMPRINT: "Swiss Review", the magazine for the Swiss abroad, is in its 36th year of publication and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in 14 regional editions. It has a total circulation of 408 000. Regional news appears four times a year.

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Illustration by Hannes Binder from the new Heidi book

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Cover photo: Armoured infantry in the Swiss army (photo: Keystone)