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Resolutions of the Council of the Swiss Abroad

The Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) appointed its representatives for the period 2009-2013 at its meeting in the hall of Lucerne's cantonal parliament. The debate focussed on the issues of political recognition for Swiss citizens abroad by the authorities and the importance of providing information for them. These issues prompted the passing of three resolutions concerning Swissinfo, "Swiss Review" and federal government's policy towards the Swiss abroad.

The Council now has 140 members: 120 Swiss abroad and 20 Swiss living in Switzerland (compared to 40 previously). This means that greater weight is ascribed to the delegates of the Swiss communities abroad to strengthen the Council's representation of the interests of the Swiss abroad. On behalf of the Council, its President, Jacques-Simon Eggly, confirmed the results of the election of delegates in which Swiss communities around the world took part through umbrella organisations of the Swiss associations and institutions recognised by OSA. 45% of the delegates in the new Council were elected for the first time. The average age of the delegates is 56, and 30% of them are women. The geographical spread is as follows: Europe is the most strongly represented continent with 60 delegates, followed by North and South America (30 delegates), Asia (16 delegates), Africa (8 delegates) and Oceania (6 delegates). Each delegate represents the vote of 1000 Swiss citizens living abroad. Members elected who are based in Switzerland, and who will represent the resolutions passed in plenary sessions to the Swiss authorities, include: Member of the Council of States Filippo Lombardi (CVP/TI) as well as National Councilors Christa Markwalder Bär (FDP/BE), Thérèse Meyer-Kaelin (CVP/FR), Carlo Sommaruga (SP/GE), Antonio Hodggers (Greens/GE), Hans Kaufmann (SVP/GE) and André Reymond (SVP/GE).

The CSA is anxious about the wavering commitment shown by federal gov-

ernment to the Swiss abroad. In all parts of the world where Swiss communities are found, consulates are being closed and information for the Swiss abroad has been subject to Draconian cuts ("Swiss Review") or once again called into question (Swissinfo). The CSA has called on federal government to make the concerns of the Swiss abroad a priority and, to this end, to enact an implementing law for Article 40 of the Federal Constitution and to bring all associated issues together under one department. The CSA will contest any proposals aimed at reducing the provision of information for the Swiss abroad; indeed, Swissinfo is at risk of further budget cuts. Finally, the CSA demanded a CHF 300,000 increase in the budget for "Swiss Review" for 2010 so that the magazine could once again be published six times a year instead of just four.

Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lucerne

The Swiss abroad met at their annual congress in Lucerne held over three days. More than 400 expatriates attended the 87th Congress of the Swiss Abroad. This year's congress focussed on the topic of the Swiss abroad themselves. The debate centred on whether the 700,000 Swiss living abroad represent an asset for Switzerland.

To what extent does a large and well-organised Diaspora provide added value for Switzerland? What benefits does the network of contacts that Swiss people have established all over the world offer Switzerland? How important is international experience and knowledge transfer for Switzerland and its economy?

These and many other questions were discussed on Saturday, 8 August 2009 in front of an audience of around 400 Swiss abroad at the plenary meeting held in the Swiss Museum of Transport in Lucerne. Well-known speakers explored the myths and reality of the contribution made to Switzerland by Swiss people living abroad in short presentations and round-table sessions.

The new chairman of the Swiss Post Office, Claude Bégli, recalled his own experiences as a Swiss abroad in his humorous opening speech entitled "The travel adventures of the Swiss Marco Polo". The theatrical performance delivered by the charismatic chairman of the Swiss Post Office captivated the audience and earned him an ovation.

Federal Chancellor Corina Casanova, representing the Federal Council, gave her speech at the end of the day. She said that the Swiss abroad were Switzerland's ambassadors on the international stage but that they had unfortunately had little opportunity to express their opinions in Swiss political life. She explained that it was therefore important to facilitate their access to the democratic process, in particular through e-voting.

On Sunday, exploring the city of Lucerne was on the itinerary with a guided tour of the historical centre and the surrounding area, including a trip to the Rigi.

The next Congress of the Swiss Abroad will be held in St. Gallen from 20 to 22 August 2010.

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