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Baltisser: "People who vote for the SVP vote for Swiss values"

SVP International was founded in 1992 as a political association for Swiss people abroad. The Committee consists of influential SVP politicians and dedicated Swiss abroad. Together with the General Secretariat it works to promote ties between the Fifth Switzerland and the federal Parliament. In an interview with "Swiss Review", SVP General Secretary Martin Baltisser stresses the importance of Swiss voters abroad. By Heinz Eckert

"SWISS REVIEW": *What do the Swiss abroad mean to you?*

MARTIN BALTISSER: They mean a great deal to me. After all, I was a founding member of SVP International back in 1992. When postal voting was introduced for Swiss abroad, it was immediately clear to us that they should also be given the opportunity to align themselves with a party.

What were the aims behind the foundation of SVP International?

Our objective was, and still is, to forge contacts between Swiss nationals living abroad as well as between them and their home country. SVP International also aims to make an important contribution to protecting the interests of Swiss abroad here in Switzerland. Naturally, we endeavour to include their concerns in Swiss federal politics when preparing responses to consultations or initiatives. The SVP International Committee is made up of dedicated Swiss abroad as well as influential SVP politicians.

Much of the SVP's manifesto does not necessarily reflect the views and interests of Swiss people abroad. The SVP's No to the EU surely can't be in the interests of Swiss nationals living there?

I'm not so sure. Most Swiss abroad join the SVP because they want to see traditional Swiss values defended. We want to

see to it that these values are not abandoned. What's more, a great many Swiss strongly support our European policy because they live in the EU and can see for themselves what EU membership would mean for Switzerland. SVP International represents the interests of the Swiss people, who want a self-assured country where prosperity, security and freedom thrive. They therefore support independence, low taxes, a well-equipped army and police force, and a neutral foreign policy.

Of all the Swiss parties, yours is the most active in terms of the Swiss abroad community. Why?

Because we have the most active Swiss abroad. Also, we afforded the Swiss abroad community the status of a cantonal party from the outset, and fully integrated it into our parent party. That has to be a major factor in our success.

How many members do you have among the Swiss abroad?

It's difficult to say, since we don't keep a central register of members. We estimate that there are several hundred. The hard core of Swiss abroad who also pay mem-

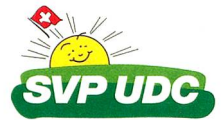
bership fees totals around three hundred. Membership among the Swiss abroad has grown at the same rate as membership at home. There was a veritable wave of new members when Christoph Blocher was voted off the Federal Council.

How do you maintain contact with Swiss abroad?

We mainly use our electronic channels, though we also write to registered members. In future, we plan to introduce communities so that our party allies abroad can have interactive discussions with each other. We also keep our members regularly informed through our newsletters.



Martin Baltisser, General Secretary of the SVP



What does the Council of the Swiss Abroad mean to you?

The Council of the Swiss Abroad in itself is a good institution. Unfortunately, the SVP is extremely under-represented on this council, even though it is by far the strongest party in the Swiss Parliament. That needs to change.

Will a Swiss abroad ever make it onto the National Council?

Since candidates have to put themselves up for election in a canton, that would be very difficult, but by no means impossible. There are certainly some highly eligible candidates around, and for the 2011 elections we will once more campaign with as many lists of Swiss abroad as possible. At present it is the SVP National Councilors who guarantee a link between the Swiss abroad and the federal Parliament.

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