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"We support first-rate representations, swissinfo and 'Swiss Review'"

As a party with 100,000 members, the Christian Democratic People's Party (CVP) wishes to represent everyone who supports Switzerland's development. A high-quality environment for families, an attractive location for business, secure jobs, a stable social welfare system and sustainable environmental protection: in addition to the interests of the Swiss abroad, these are the issues that Kathy Riklin also aims to focus on as President of CVP International. Interview by Heinz Eckert

What do the Swiss abroad mean to CVP International?

The CVP, which supports a policy of openness, sees the 700,000 Swiss citizens abroad as ambassadors and representatives of our homeland, Switzerland. The community of the Swiss abroad also represents a key link to countries on all continents, like a kind of external antenna. The CVP believes it is important that the Swiss abroad community is involved in debates and participates in our political life in Switzerland.



Kathy Riklin, born in 1952 and the holder of a doctorate in science from the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, has been a CVP National Councillor for Zurich since 1999 and is a member of the Foreign Policy Committee, the EFTA/European Parliament delegation and the University of Zurich's University Council. She has been presiding over the CVP's International Section since her appointment this year.

What do you consider to be the most urgent political issues regarding the Swiss abroad?

The top priority is clearly providing the Swiss community abroad with proper and comprehensive information. swissinfo, which the CVP has always supported, plays a key role here. The Swiss abroad should have easy access to our referenda and elections. The CVP is therefore backing a parliamentary initiative aimed at simplifying the exercise of political rights for the Swiss abroad. Maintaining and supporting the highly regarded Swiss schools abroad is another issue that is important to us. Their alumni are the ideal advertisement for our country. And to en-

sure Swiss people can easily find good jobs abroad, we are also working towards ensuring the recognition of our educational and professional qualifications abroad. Securing the social welfare system, for the Swiss abroad as well, especially voluntary old-age, survivors' and disability insurance (AHV/IV), is of major importance.

Do you take note of the debates of the Council of the Swiss Abroad and what significance do its resolutions have for CVP International?

In National Councillor Thérèse Meyer-Kaelin, CVP/FR, we have an Executive

Board member on the Council of the Swiss Abroad, and our National Councillors and members of the Council of States regularly take part in the meetings of the "Swiss abroad" parliamentary group, which is chaired by Council of States member Filippo Lombardi, CVP/TI. The CVP representation in the Federal Palace is well aware of the issues and concerns of the community of the Swiss abroad.

The budget for "Swiss Review" has been cut, swissinfo is in danger and savings are con-

stantly being made on the network of representations. What is your view on these developments?

The CVP very much regrets these developments and believes they are misguided and short-sighted. Our Members of Parliament constantly argue in favour of swissinfo and "Swiss Review" as well as for strong diplomatic representation of Switzerland abroad at meetings of the Foreign Policy Committee and during debates on the budget.

Will a member of the Swiss abroad community ever be elected to the National Council? And how important is this issue to the CVP?

If the candidate has strong connections with Switzerland, then why not? Otherwise, it would be difficult. Elected members of the National Council have to spend around 100 days a year in Berne if they want to have an influence in the parliamentary groups and committees as well as the four sessions. That level of commitment cannot really be combined with another full-time position.

There will be federal elections next year. Why should Swiss people abroad vote for the CVP?

The CVP deserves the votes of the Swiss abroad because we are a party of openness, but at the same time one with deep roots. We represent values that are vitally important to many Swiss abroad. These include solidarity, sustainability, individual and joint responsibility and consideration for all Swiss citizens. We are striving to ensure a Switzerland where we have access to foreign

markets (agreements with the EU, incl. freedom of movement of persons, free trade agreements, UNO). In Doris Leuthard, we not only have a popular figure on the Federal Council but an office holder with an extremely profes-

sional approach who conveys a positive image of Switzerland abroad as President of the Swiss Confederation, opening up new opportunities for the nation.



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