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By no means “business as usual”: Switzerland’s 2014 OSCE Chairmanship

In 2014 Switzerland became the first ever participating State of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to chair the Vienna-based organisation for a second time, following its first chairmanship in 1996. It had prepared for the many challenges with which the chairmanship is usually confronted. But as Didier Burkhalter – the 2014 Chairperson-in-Office and Switzerland’s foreign minister, who also happened to be president of the Confederation that year – said at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Basel at the start of December, 2014 had by no means been “business as usual”. It became clear early on in the year that the Ukraine crisis would be the dominant theme of this Chairmanship and the chair would have to make every effort to preserve the strands of dialogue between all actors involved in the serious situation.

Switzerland focused on dialogue, insisting on the OSCE’s added value: it is the only regional security organisation in which the western countries and the Russian Federation sit at the same table on equal terms and talk eye to eye. It was possible in this way to make use of two instruments from the OSCE’s ‘toolbox’ to particular effect in the de-escalation of the crisis. First, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) was created on 21 March 2014 following a consensus decision in the Permanent Council by all 57 OSCE participating States. Since then, the mission has made a major contribution to the management of the crisis as the ‘eyes and ears of the international community’, providing accurate independent reports daily from ten regions in Ukraine including the disputed areas Luhansk and Donetsk (<http://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm>). Second, the OSCE Chairmanship is contributing to the efforts of the Trilateral Contact Group, in which its Special Representative, Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, is working alongside high-level representatives from Ukraine and Russia. The group quickly established itself as the only operational body for discussing issues regarding a ceasefire, peace plans, the exchange of prisoners and humanitarian matters. In September 2014, the Contact Group succeeded in coming to an arrangement with representatives of separatist groups in what became known as the Minsk Protocol and Minsk Memorandum, which formed the basis and point of reference for a process aiming at a political solution to the crisis.

Although the work of its Chairmanship was very much determined by the conflict in and around Ukraine and the intensive efforts to maintain dialogue between all actors, Switzerland was also able to further its core priorities. It made progress with regard to reconciliation and closer regional cooperation in the Western Balkans and promoting dialogue and confidence-building in the South Caucasus, for example. Switzerland also supported efforts in what it considers to be central policy areas, including combating human trafficking and terrorism, protection of human rights defenders, the prevention of torture, the management of natural disasters, and combating antisemitism. The Swiss Chairmanship organised international conferences on these topics and worked to stimulate and shape discussions on the further development of measures. At the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Basel, despite political tensions due to the Ukraine crisis,

the Swiss Chairmanship managed to secure successful outcomes to negotiations in many of its priority areas (<http://www.osce.org/node/124148>).

Switzerland is continuing its work in the OSCE as an active member of the 2015 Troika, comprised of Switzerland as the outgoing chair, Serbia (2015) and Germany (2016). In this framework, Swiss President and OSCE Chairperson-in-office Didier Burkhalter launched a panel of 15 eminent persons at the Ministerial Council meeting in Basel in close cooperation with Serbia and Germany, to draw conclusions from the Ukraine crisis and support constructive and inclusive dialogue among the OSCE participating States on security across the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian regions. Switzerland will continue to actively support this process

(<http://www.osce.org/cio/133986>).

Visit the 2014 Swiss Chairmanship web dossier for more information: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/aktuell/dossiers/osze-vorsitz-2014.html>



Table of the Chairmanship in the Ministerial Council



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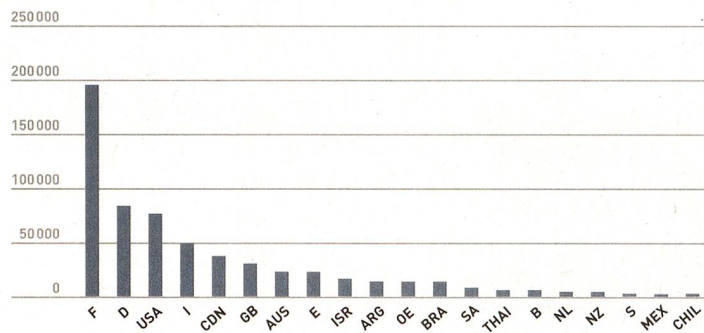
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Statistics on the Swiss Abroad

More and more Swiss are living abroad. In 2014, the number of Swiss Abroad increased by 14,726 compared to the previous year to 746,885, which equates to a rise of around 2 %. This is according to the latest statistics on the Swiss Abroad published by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). The statistics include all Swiss citizens registered with an embassy or consulate general abroad. They live in 200 countries and territories around the world.

The countries with the largest numbers of Swiss Abroad:



The greatest effective increases last year were recorded in those countries which already have the largest Swiss communities abroad: France with 3,112 more persons, Germany with 2,045 more and the USA with a rise of 1,176. The subsequent positions in the ranking order are occupied by Israel (plus 1,045), the UK (plus 1,028), Australia (plus 577) and Thailand (plus 568).

Six out of ten Swiss Abroad lived in the European Union in 2014, and three quarters of them in directly neighbouring countries. In France this amounted to 194,474 citizens, in Germany 84,671, in Italy 51,353 and in Austria 15,542.

The biggest communities of Swiss Abroad outside Europe are found in the USA with 78,696 persons holding the red passport, in Canada with 39,618, in Australia with 24,584 and in Israel with 17,958. At the bottom of the list of statistics are São Tomé and Príncipe, Kiribati and Turkmenistan, where Switzerland is represented with just one single person in each case.

Of the 583,150 Swiss Abroad of full legal age, 142,651 were registered on a Swiss electoral roll at the time of the referendum held on 30 November 2014. That is 24.5 % and signifies an increase of around 1.5 % compared to the National Council elections in 2011.

Important notice

Please notify your Swiss representation of your email address(es) and mobile telephone number(s) and/or any changes to these and register at www.swissabroad.ch to ensure you do not miss any communications ("Swiss Review", newsletters from your representation, etc.).

The latest issue of "Swiss Review" and previous issues can be read and/or printed out at any time at www.revue.ch. "Swiss Review" (or "Gazzetta Svizzera" in Italy) is sent free of charge to all households of Swiss Abroad who are registered with an embassy or consulate general either electronically (via email or as an iPad/Android app) or in printed format.

Federal referenda

Four proposals will be put to the vote on 14 June 2015:

- Federal decree of 12 December 2014 on the amendment to the constitutional provision on reproductive medicine and genetic engineering involving human beings
- Popular initiative of 20 January 2012 "Stipendieninitiative" (grants initiative)
- Popular initiative of 15 February 2013 "Millionen-Erbschaften besteuern für unsere AHV (Erbchaftssteuerreform)" (Tax million-franc inheritances for our old-age and survivors' insurance (AHV) - (inheritance tax reform))
- Amendment of 26 September 2014 to the Federal Act on Radio and Television

All information on the proposals (voting pamphlet, committees, party statements, electronic voting, etc.) can be found at www.ch.ch/en/votes.

Other referendum dates in 2015: 18 October (federal elections), 29 November. You will find facts, instructions, useful information and additional links concerning the federal elections on 18 October 2015 at www.ch.ch/en/elections2015 – a joint website provided by the Federal Chancellery, Parliamentary Services and the Federal Statistical Office and ch.ch.

Popular initiatives

The following new federal popular initiatives had been launched at the time of going to press (deadline for the collection of signatures in brackets):

- "Raus aus der Sackgasse! Verzicht auf die Wiedereinführung von Zuwanderungskontingenten" (Out of the cul-de-sac – avoid reintroduction of immigration quotas) (02.06.2016)

The list of pending popular initiatives can be found at www.bk.admin.ch under Aktuell > Wahlen und Abstimmungen > Hängige Volksinitiativen.

The 2015 Federal Council photograph

The traditional photograph of the complete Federal Council caused a degree of astonishment this year as the government was not photographed standing as usual but instead sitting grouped around a table.

(from left to right): Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter, Federal Councillor Johann N. Schneider-Ammann (Vice-President), Federal Councillor Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard, Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer, President of the Swiss Confederation Simonetta Sommaruga, Federal Councillor Alain Berset and Federal Chancellor Corina Casanova



Press comments on the 2015 Federal Council photograph:

Basler Zeitung, Basel: “Da Vinci style” – the national government has clearly decided not to take a stand on issues in future but instead to sit them out.

Tages-Anzeiger, Zurich: The interpretations ranged from the religious (a copy of Leonar-

do da Vinci’s “The Last Supper”) to the banal (regulars’ table in the bar) and the offensive (mafia family).

NZZ, Zurich: The Federal Council should first of all sit down together at the start of the year.

Die Südostschweiz, Chur: The Federal Chancellery describes the photo as “concordance in practice”. The question now is how many of

them will be left at the end of the 2015 election year and whether a traitor will emerge like at the Last Supper.

Tribune de Genève, Geneva: It does not get any more egalitarian than that. This is the clear message to Parliament which will vote on a law in favour of female quotas in corporate management in 2015.

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