

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 43 (2016)
Heft: 6

Rubrik: Imprint

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100 years of the OSA and six priorities for the future

2016 will remain in the memories of members and friends of the “Fifth Switzerland” as the centenary year of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA). The celebratory year was marked by events, exhibitions and publications. But what will be the legacy at the end of it?

ARIANE RUSTICHELLI, FOR THE DIRECTION OF THE OSA

Having officially begun on 2 March, a day before the issue date of the special stamp commemorating 100 years of the OSA, the anniversary year had two highlights. Firstly, the ceremony marking 25 years of the Area for the Swiss Abroad in Brunnen attended by Johann Schneider-Ammann, President of the Swiss Confederation, during which a permanent exhibition of posters on the history of Swiss emigration was officially opened. The second memorable moment was the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Berne. On 5 August, the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) delegates had the honour of sitting in the Federal Palace. This shows just how important the 762,000 Swiss Abroad are



Sarah Mastantuoni (left) and Ariane Rustichelli, directors of the OSA. Photo OSA

to the Swiss Confederation. The presence and speech by Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter on the Bundesplatz during the official part of the event in front of hundreds of people and 170 young Swiss Abroad who had come especially for the occasion further underlined this message. With free concerts and activities for everyone, the celebrations were a huge success.

Under the motto “Switzerland in the world”, the anniversary year set out to look back on 100 years of history of Swiss emigration and the OSA. However, this reflection on the past primarily sought to look

to the future. The international migration of our fellow citizens continues to increase and to take new forms. What will be the specific requirements of future emigrants? Questions are consequently also raised about the role of the OSA and the services it will make available. To provide answers, a questionnaire was sent to the delegates of the CSA. The results were made public at the CSA meeting on 5 August in Berne. On this basis, six development priorities were defined and adopted by the Council’s members. They represent a roadmap for the OSA in the years to come and to some extent a legislative programme. Their aim is to:

- improve information for the Swiss Abroad, above all through the “Swiss Review”, but also through other existing OSA information channels.
- better integrate young people in the OSA’s structures, ensuring in particular a minimum number of seats for young people on the CSA.
- open up the electoral base of the Council of the Swiss Abroad so that all Swiss Abroad can elect their delegates to the CSA.
- encourage the political participation of the Swiss Abroad by introducing electronic voting.
- increase contact between the Swiss societies worldwide through an information and exchange of expertise initiative undertaken by the OSA.
- raise the profile of the OSA in Switzerland and abroad through promotional campaigns.

These goals, some of which are already in progress, are certainly ambitious. However, it is vital that they are achieved in order for the OSA to ensure its services meet the challenges of future migration and the specific requirements involved. This is crucial if it is to continue to carry out its mission in an optimal way which involves representing and protecting the interests of the Swiss Abroad.

The detailed results of the questionnaire and further information about the future development priorities are available at: <http://aso.ch/en/about-ourselves/the-osa/aims>.

IMPRINT:
“Swiss Review”, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 42nd year of publication and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in 14 regional editions. It has a total circulation of 400,000, including 165,000 electronic copies. Regional news appears four times a year. The ordering parties

are fully responsible for the content of advertisements and promotional inserts. This content does not necessarily represent the opinion of either the editorial office or the publisher.
EDITORS: Marko Lehtinen (LEH), Editor-in-Chief; Stéphane Herzog (SH); Marc Lettau (MUL); Jürg Müller (JM); Peter Zimmerli (PZ), responsible for

“news.admin.ch”, Relations with the Swiss Abroad, FDFA, 3003 Berne, Switzerland
TRANSLATION: CLS Communication AG
LAYOUT: Joseph Haas, Zürich
PRINT: Vogt-Schild Druck AG, 4552 Derendingen
POSTAL ADDRESS: Publisher, editorial office, advertising: Organisation of the

Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Tel.: +41313566110, Fax: +41313566101, Postal account (Swiss National Giro): 30-6768-9. Email: revue@aso.ch

COPY DEADLINE for this edition: 03.10.2016

All Swiss Abroad who are registered with a Swiss representation receive the magazine free of charge. Anyone else can subscribe to the magazine for an annual fee (Switzerland: CHF 30 / abroad: CHF 50). Subscribers are sent the magazine direct from Berne. www.revue.ch

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