

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 45 (2018)
Heft: 5

Rubrik: OSA news

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“Switzerland without Europe – Europe without Switzerland”

Europe was the central theme of this year's Congress of the Swiss Abroad calling for a taking stock of bilateral relations.



Switzerland without Europe? Europe without Switzerland? Strictly speaking, neither are possible – Remo Gysin, president of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), made that clear right at the beginning of the plenary session of the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Visp. Gysin said, “Neither alternative works, because Switzerland is as clearly a part of Europe as every other European country.”

The scene in the Visp Convention Centre, where delegates from around the world engaged in a lively debate.

The position of official Switzerland was outlined in Visp by Roberto Balzaretti, State Secretary and head of the Directorate for European Affairs of the FDFA: “To ensure the prosperity of Switzerland, relations with Europe need to be strengthened in the long term while respecting sovereignty.” He added in reference to the currently somewhat tense relations between Bern and Brussels that an agreement

needs to be found in which both sides make concessions. One should not close oneself off and withdraw, but approach each other openly in order to find solutions, he said.

“Switzerland and Europe are dependent on each other more than ever. It is time to reach a joint agreement as a stable framework is in the interest of all,” was the stance taken by Michael Matthiessen, the ambassador of the

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA)

Alpenstrasse 26
CH-3006 Berne
Tel. +41 31 356 61 00
Fax +41 31 356 61 01
info@aso.ch
www.aso.ch
www.revue.ch
www.swisscommunity.org

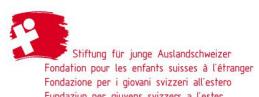


Our partners:

educationsuisse
Tel. +41 31 356 61 04
Fax +41 31 356 61 01
info@educationsuisse.ch
www.educationsuisse.ch



Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad
Tel. +41 31 356 61 16
Fax +41 31 356 61 01
info@sjas.ch
www.sjas.ch



European Union for Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein. Matthiessen said, "The EU is Switzerland's biggest trading partner, and if Europe is doing well, Switzerland also benefits."

A debate in Visp highlighted just how intensively the discussion about relations with Europe is being conducted in Switzerland: the positions of Lukas Reimann, Swiss People's Party (SVP) National Councillor and president of the Campaign for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland (AUNS), and Claude Nicati, member of the Executive Board of the New European Movement Switzerland (NEBS), in particular, were completely irreconcilable.

The directors of OSA, Ariane Rustichelli and Sarah Mastantuoni, stated

in conclusion, "The topic of relations between Switzerland and Europe goes far beyond a purely European issue. It has a global dimension, not only because of the consequences for Switzerland, but also because of the impact on domestic and foreign policy and the economy."

Switzerland's relations with Europe were also central to the voting positions decided by the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA). It declared itself against the popular initiative "Swiss law instead of foreign judges" with 78 votes to 12 (see also Votes and elections on page 10). The assessment of the CSA majority was that the Swiss Abroad would be the first to feel the negative consequences of this "Self-Determination Initiative". Prior to the vote, National Councillor Carlo

Ensuring Swiss Nazi victims are not forgotten

The Council of the Swiss Abroad clearly supports the idea of a memorial to Swiss victims of the Holocaust.

During the Second World War, more than 200 Swiss citizens were gassed, shot or slain in Nazi concentration camps. No single violent confrontation in the last 200 years has claimed more Swiss lives. More than 700 other Swiss citizens survived the camps, but remained marked by the consequences of the atrocities suffered there.

This fact is largely unknown. That is why the OSA is now calling for a memorial to remember the victims. During its session on 10 August 2018 at the congress in Visp, the Council of the Swiss Abroad clearly backed the demand with 120 votes in favour. There were no votes against.

OSA President Remo Gysin emphasised in the debate preceding the decision that it is right for the Swiss Abroad to have called for this overdue historical reappraisal. For them it is "particularly clear that the history of Switzerland does not end at the Swiss border", he said.

No definite project exists at present, and financing of the hoped-for memorial has also still to be worked out. But following the clear vote in Visp, the OSA will further examine the issue and establish contact with other interested organisations.

(MUL)

The goal: electronic votes for everyone by 2021

The Council of the Swiss Abroad has reacted to the growing criticism surrounding electronic voting by launching a petition. E-voting is the only way to guarantee all Swiss Abroad their political rights, according to the CSA.

Some 172,100 Swiss living abroad are listed in an electoral register and can thus vote and take part in elections in Switzerland. But often the wish to exercise these political rights remains unfulfilled: voting documents frequently arrive too late, and eligible voters living far from their homeland often cannot take part in votes or elections.

Now the Swiss Abroad are bringing more pressure to bear in this area. At the session of the Council of the Swiss Abroad that took place on 10 August 2018 in Visp, delegates from around the world decided to launch the online petition proposed by the OSA and to call for the

rapid development of an electronic voting and election platform. E-voting is ultimately the only way that guarantees that the Swiss living abroad can exercise their political rights, a number of delegates pointed out.

The petition, addressed to the Federal Council and parliament, specifically calls for e-voting to be made possible for all Swiss Abroad by 2021. To lend weight to its demand, the OSA is hoping for 10,000 signatures. The petition can be signed online until 28 November 2018 (see link at the end of article). Immediately after the collection deadline – on 30 November 2018 – it will be submitted to the Federal Chancellery.

www.evoting2021.ch

Sommargua (Swiss Social Democratic Party SP/GE) summed up the stance of the CSA majority: "This initiative calls into question Switzerland's international involvement and puts the stability and prosperity of Switzerland at risk."

It is possible to view proceedings at the 96th Congress of the Swiss Abroad from 10 to 12 August 2018 in Visp: the recorded live stream is available on the OSA website (www.oso.ch). The date of the next Congress of the Swiss Abroad has now been confirmed. It will take place from 16 to 18 August 2019 in Montreux under the motto: "Which world for tomorrow?"

IMPRINT:
"Swiss Review", the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 44th year of publication and is published in German, French, English and Spanish in 14 regional editions. It has a total circulation of 425,000, including 218,287 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: Marc Lettau (MUL),
Editor-in-Chief, Stéphane Herzog (SH);
Jürg Müller (JM); Simone Flubacher (SF),

responsible for "news.admin.ch",
Relations with the Swiss Abroad, FDFA,
3003 Berne, Switzerland
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Sandra Krebs
TRANSLATION: Schnellübersetzer GmbH
LAYOUT: Joseph Haas, Zürich
PRINT: Vogt-Schild Druck AG,
4552 Dierdeningen
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: 2.8.2018

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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Advice and help for those wanting to study in Switzerland

educationsuisse advises young Swiss Abroad in all matters pertaining to education – from the choice of the education programme to financing

The employees of educationsuisse advise young Swiss Abroad as well as graduates of Swiss schools abroad on all matters relating to education or training in Switzerland. This free advice in German, French, English, Italian or Spanish usually takes place by email or telephone. The team provides information on admission to higher education institutions, required language skills, vocational education, scholarships, accommodation and other topics. A personal consultation on-site in Bern is also possible by appointment.

Specific consultation on choice of profession and course of study is offered by educationsuisse in collaboration with the Berufsberatungs- und Informationszentrum (BIZ) Bern-Mittelland (Career Consulting and Information Centre). These consultations can be carried out via Skype or on-site in Bern. In a personal dialogue with a qualified specialist, individual questions about the choice of profession and course of study are addressed. Registration for these fee-based consultations can be done via educationsuisse.

Once there is a plan in place for a vocational education or university studies in Switzerland, there are many practical matters to be addressed. The financing of the education or training has to be clarified. While fees for studying or training in Switzerland are rather low, the cost of living is higher than in many other countries. In principle parents are responsible for financing the education of their children. For those with more limited financial means, there is the possibility of applying for a cantonal educational grant (scholarship). Responsibility for educational grants to young Swiss Abroad lies with the home canton. It should be checked first, though, if in the parents' country of residence support would be given for education or training in Switzerland. Sometimes universities or private foundations also grant education subsidies. educationsuisse assists in clarifying scholarship entitlement and takes care of the scholarship dossiers of young Swiss Abroad. Furthermore, thanks to various funds, educationsuisse can also award educational grants in the form of scholarships or loans. Employees of educationsuisse can be reached by email at info@educationsuisse.ch or by phone on +41 (0)31 356 61 04. (RG)



The youth offer for this winter

New Year's ski camp for young people in Valbella (GR), 26 Dec 2018–4 Jan 2019

Participants can expect a varied programme in the Grisons Alps. In addition to ski or snowboard lessons in small groups and a variety of fringe activities, there will also be time to make new acquaintances. Participants will be looked after by a trained and motivated leadership team. This offer is for adolescents between the ages of 15 and 18.

Adult winter sports camp in Saas-Grund (VS), 27 Dec 2018–5 Jan 2019

Now for the third time, we are offering young adults and those young at heart from the age of 18 a winter sports camp in the Valais Alps. This year the ski and snowboard camp will be held in Saas-Grund. Follow the link for a preview of the accommodation and ski resort: www.ferienhaus-schoenblick.ch and www.saas-fee.ch

German language course in Bern and French in Biel, 7–18 Jan 2019

Four language lessons in the morning, activities together in the afternoon and a welcoming host family. We encourage participants to learn German or French as one of the four national languages.

Subsidies

The Youth Service has funding available to provide support to financially disadvantaged participants: www.swisscommunity.org/de/jugend/beitragsreduktion

Registration

Places are still available. You can find more information about the offers and registration on our website: www.swisscommunity.org/de/jugend/jugendangebote.

Financial support for Swiss families abroad

The aim of the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad is to make it possible for every Swiss child living abroad to take part in a camp in Switzerland at least once – regardless of the financial situation of their family.

To make that possible, the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) collects funds every year that are intended to benefit these children. The FYSA encourages families that do not have the necessary financial means to register and fill in our application form. That way their child, too, can have a stay in Switzerland.

Families can obtain more information about the possibility of cost reductions and the conditions attached directly from the office of the FYSA.

The FYSA is looking forward to meeting many children who are curious about their Swiss roots and would like to get to know and experience Switzerland first-hand.



Winter camps for children aged 8 to 14

There are still some places free in our New Year's ski camp in Les Diablerets

Date: Wednesday, 26 December 2018 to Friday, 4 January 2019

Number of participants: 42

Fee: CHF 900 (contribution to the camp)

Ski or snowboard hire: approx. CHF 150

Registration

Details about the winter camp and the registration form can be found at <http://sjas.ch/en/>. Reduced rates are offered in justified cases. We will be pleased to post our information brochure to you on request. The winter camp in Les Diablerets (VD) is the only one offered by the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA) during the 2018-19 winter season.

THE SWISS ABROAD ON INSTAGRAM



“Switzerland is still a political oasis of sorts”

Globe-trotting 32-year-old Robert Woodrich was born and raised in Canada and now lives and runs a business in Thailand. But his Swiss ancestral roots still lead him to consider Switzerland as a third “home away from home”.

My job: In 2016 I landed an opportunity to work with an American public relations firm in the heart of Bangkok. This position allowed me to learn about the regional business landscape, network, and start to prepare longer-term plans. After about one year in Thailand, I made the transition to founding and running my own company.

My Thailand: There are many ways in which I enjoy a higher quality of life in Thailand compared to Canada. For example, I can afford to hire a maid who does my laundry. The food is absolutely brilliant, although not identical to that found in western Thai restaurants.

My Switzerland: My impression of Switzerland from abroad is probably rather romantic – my fondest memories are of long ago, whereas things have changed since then. However, in a time when European countries lurch from one crisis to the next, Switzerland still appears a political oasis of sorts.

My heart: I miss Switzerland because of what it represents for me – a time when my family and I were all together in one place. These days, we are scattered across three continents. On a more practical level, I would certainly appreciate some of Switzerland's cleanliness, natural landscapes, and political stability.

The original interview was published on swissinfo.ch, the online service of the Swiss Broadcasting Company, which is available in ten languages. Do you live abroad too? Then tag your Instagram photos **#WeAreSwissAbroad**.