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“Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland” affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

The Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) has endorsed the idea of setting up a memorial to Swiss holocaust victims. It has also reiterated its call for an electronic voting channel while laying the groundwork to improve its own election procedure. These resolutions were passed by circular vote, because the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the CSA from holding a physical meeting.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been hampering Switzerland's democratic processes since the beginning of March, causing the postponement of countless parliamentary meetings at municipal and cantonal level in recent weeks and months. Direct democracy has also fallen foul of the coronavirus. For example, the scope for collecting signatures for popular initiatives has been curtailed.

It therefore came as no surprise that the CSA, which is very international and is referred to as the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”, was unable to convene as scheduled on 14 March in Berne. Out of consideration for the health of CSA delegates, and because it was basically no longer possible for these delegates to travel to Switzerland from around the world, the Executive Board of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) decided to cancel the CSA meeting and settle the most pressing issues by circular vote.

First on the agenda were items vital to the everyday running of the OSA, such as approving the annual financial statements, defining a budget for the current year and formally granting discharge to the Executive Board and directors. All motions were approved.

Next on the agenda were decisions regarding the CSA's strategic focus and tasks. The CSA gave its emphatic backing to a memorial for Swiss Nazi victims (see our background article in edition 1/2020 of the “Swiss Review”). It will continue its project work on the basis of this decision. In addition, the CSA set out its priorities

for the current year. These include retaining e-voting as an option for the Swiss Abroad. The erratic nature of postal deliveries in recent months has underlined the importance of the e-voting cause. Developing a new OSA website that will serve the needs of the “Fifth Switzerland” more effectively also remains a top priority, as is making further improvements to this magazine: our reader survey is already up and running (survey2020.foeg.ch).

Another circular vote saw the CSA approve the legal basis for the direct election of CSA delegates. Under the regulations that have now been adopted, constituencies are entitled to use e-voting to elect their delegates directly. This will help to cement the political legitimacy of elected delegates and the CSA as a whole. (ASO)



Congress in Lugano postponed until 2021

Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the Congress of the Swiss Abroad will not be taking place this August in Lugano. Continued global uncertainty, severe limitations on travel, and restrictions on large gatherings in Switzerland have thwarted plans to hold this extremely internationally oriented event as scheduled. The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) has therefore decided to postpone the Congress of the Swiss Abroad until 20–22 August 2021. The congress venue (Palazzo dei Congressi in Lugano, canton of Ticino) and theme (“What are the challenges facing our democracy?”) remain unchanged.

(JF)

Postal delivery of “Swiss Review” severely hampered

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on postal services, resulting in severe restrictions on mail deliveries between Switzerland and many other countries. Inter-continental postal services, such as those that connect the countries of southern Africa, have been particularly hard hit. Consequently, readers in many parts of the world received the April print edition extremely late or not at all. Some readers are also likely to experience problems receiving this, our latest July edition. We in the “Swiss Review” editorial team, as well as our publisher, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, deeply regret this and

hope postal services around the world return to normal for the remainder of 2020. Readers who are overseas and/or in countries with generally unreliable postal services are advised to switch to an online subscription, which is also free of charge. (MUL)

If you wish to receive the online version instead of the printed edition, you can notify your Swiss representation directly. An even easier way to switch formats is to specify your preference on the FDFA website:

www.eda.admin.ch/swissabroad

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