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From student to skilled worker

educationsuisse provides advice to young Swiss Abroad who come to Switzerland to further their education. Melina Mutti is one such expatriate. She talked to us about her experiences after arriving in Switzerland.

“I grew up in France, not far from my country of birth. I used to be able to see Switzerland on the other side of Lake Geneva from my bedroom window! Growing up on the “wrong” side of the border is strange, because you never really feel at home, however much you identify with either country. But it also throws up opportunities and gives you plenty of life experience.

As the daughter of German- and French-speaking bilingual parents, I was able to maintain a connection with my home country because I could speak Swiss German. I left Switzerland and the canton of Berne when I was seven – and returned in 2015 at the age of 21. After studying for two years in France without any great conviction, I wanted to do something meaningful as a career. I felt I wanted to use my hands to make things that were aesthetically pleasing and worthwhile. I therefore decided to learn a trade and ended up



Six years on since returning to Switzerland, and I still have no regrets about coming back. Coping with change is always a challenge, and you often need a helping hand. Over the years, my family and I have always been supported by Swiss institutions and the Swiss community abroad.

I am now proud to be teaching clothes design at the same school at which I did my apprenticeship. Thanks to grants from my home canton of Berne and to the people from educationsuisse who assisted me during those years, I was able to complete my training and find my own purpose in life with a career that suited me. I now enjoy helping to train young men and women and giving them a chance to strike their own path.”

Testimonies from young Swiss Abroad are regularly published on the educationsuisse Facebook page and at www.educationsuisse.ch.

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at a fashion school in Valais to do an apprenticeship as a clothes designer specialising in women's fashion. This after studying Arabic linguistics! At first glance, the work seemed fairly straightforward for an “egghead” like me. But I really had to put everything into getting a qualification at the end of my three years there. Afterwards, I decided to go one step further and do a textile diploma at a college of higher education. I had two options: Zurich or Lugano. Without speaking a single word of Italian, I chose Lugano – or the STA Lugano fashion school (Scuola specializzata superiore di abbigliamento e design della moda), to be precise. It was certainly one of the best but also one of the most difficult decisions of my life. Luckily, I was able to fit very easily and quickly into Ticino life. At the end of my two years there, I was completely bilingual and had a group of Italian-speaking friends.

“Coping with change is always a challenge, and you often need a helping hand,” says Melina Mutti.

Photo provided



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Filippo Lombardi succeeds Remo Gysin

Remo Gysin stepped down from his role as president of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) at the end of August. The Council of the Swiss Abroad elected former Ticino member of the Council of States Filippo Lombardi as his successor.

MARC LETTAU

The Council of the Swiss Abroad, the “Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland”, left no room for doubt following its meeting on 20 August: it emphatically backed the election of Filippo Lombardi from Ticino as the successor to former National Councillor Remo Gysin (SP, BS), who stepped down from his role as president of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) after six years. The new president is well known to the OSA: as the former OSA vice-president, Lombardi is familiar with its current agenda; and as one of the pioneers of the Swiss Abroad Act in force since 2015, he knows all about the issues relating to the 776,300 Swiss passport holders who live outside the country. Lombardi is currently a city councillor for Lugano. Until 2019, he represented the CVP, since renamed “Die Mitte” (The Centre), in the Council of States, of which he was a member for ten years.

Switzerland-EU relationship is still a challenge

In his farewell address, outgoing President Remo Gysin talked about gratitude. He expressed his thanks for the enriching meetings with all the Swiss Abroad, who impressed him with their “fascinating mix of feeling Swiss and openness to the world”. In addition, he said he was not just leaving “an OSA that is on track” to his successor. There are also major challenges to face. For example, Lombardi will have to establish what the failed negotiations over a framework agreement with the European Union mean for the 434,000 Swiss who live in the EU. Gysin’s verdict: “I am missing a strategy from the Federal Council.” It is unclear, “just what the Federal Council now wants”. Filippo Lombardi said the Switzerland-EU relationship would undoubtedly shape the beginning of his presidency. He doesn’t see it as his role to tell the Swiss government how to orient its EU policy. However, he will demand that the government approach the situation of the Swiss who live in the EU with due seriousness. Otherwise expatriates will suffer the consequences sooner or later. In fact, Switzerland is already experiencing the first



not inconsequential restrictions in the field of education (Erasmus) and research (Horizon). Lombardi sees the second key issue as e-voting: many Swiss Abroad will be unable to vote in Switzerland without it. That would lessen the voice of the “Fifth Switzerland”. According to Lombardi, the Council of the Swiss Abroad also needs to become more representative. Again, e-voting is the answer.

The new Council of the Swiss Abroad has approved two resolutions (see next page): it demands a “clear, transparent strategy” from the Swiss government to maintain the “achievement of freedom of movement” between Switzerland and the EU. It also wants all the vaccination certificates issued abroad to be recognised within Switzerland, provided the vaccine is recognised by the WHO.
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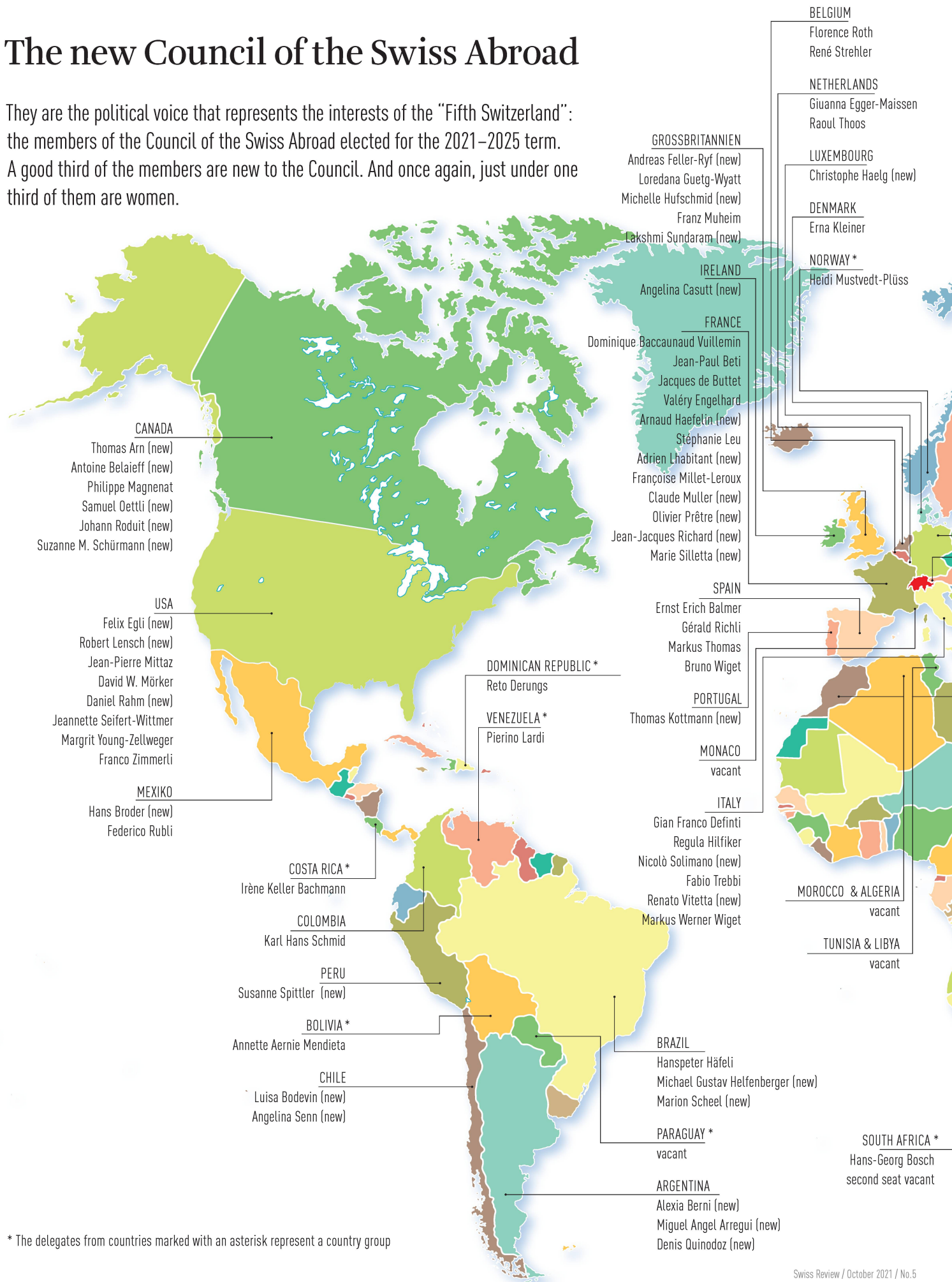
Filippo Lombardi, the new OSA president, considers Switzerland-EU relations and the reintroduction of e-voting as priority issues.
 Photo: Marc Lettau

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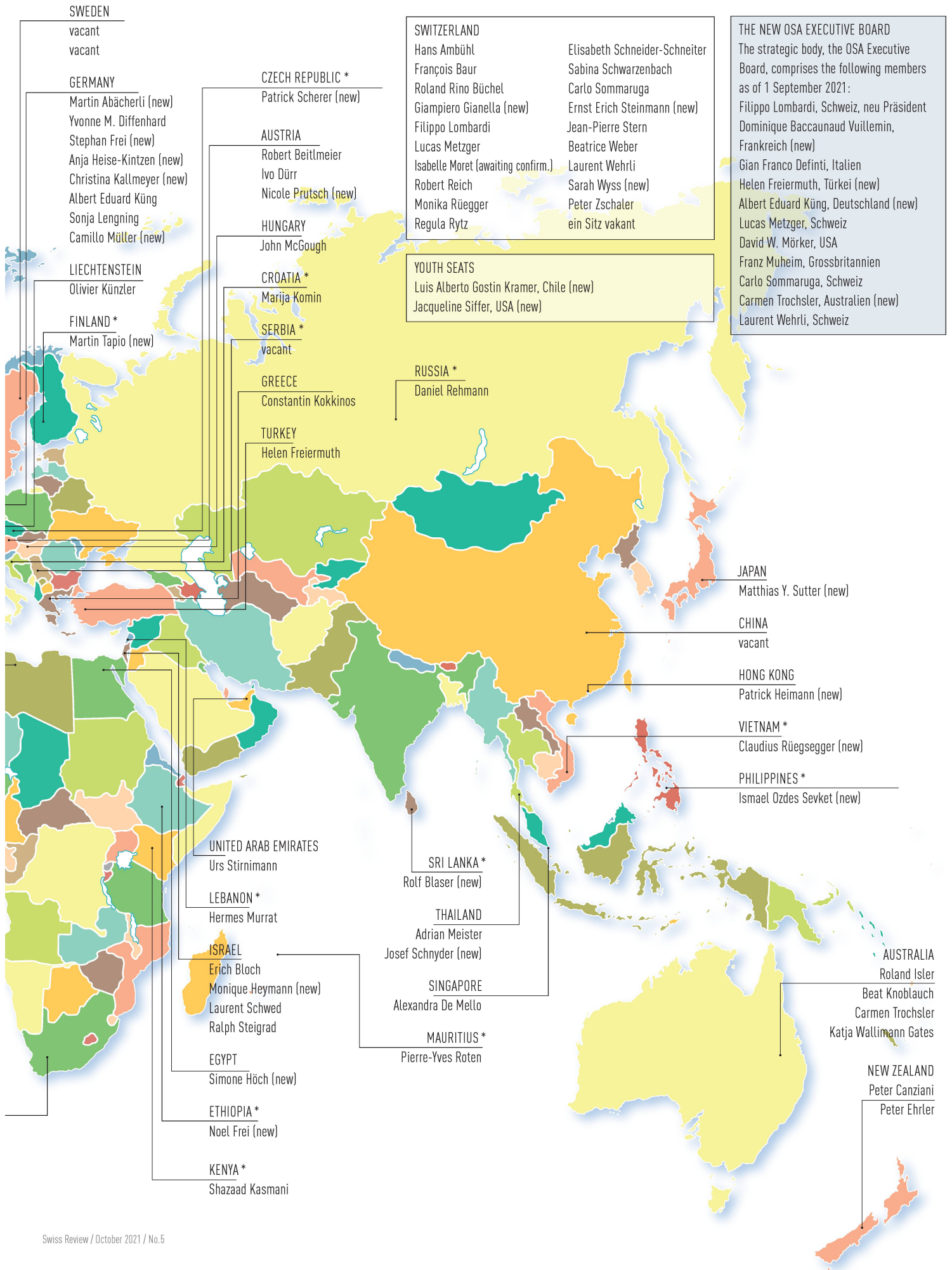
**Swiss
Community**

The new Council of the Swiss Abroad

They are the political voice that represents the interests of the “Fifth Switzerland”: the members of the Council of the Swiss Abroad elected for the 2021–2025 term. A good third of the members are new to the Council. And once again, just under one third of them are women.



* The delegates from countries marked with an asterisk represent a country group



The voice of young Swiss Abroad

Educational opportunities in Switzerland were discussed at the very first Congress of Young Swiss Abroad. Characterised by lively debate, the event showed that many young people in the “Fifth Switzerland” are interested in political participation.

MARC LETTAU

Participants in the first-ever Congress of Young Swiss Abroad naturally would have had nothing against meeting each other in person. But the event took place online – as is routine these days. However, the virtual format proved a hit. Teenagers and young adults from every corner of the world – from France to Australia, from Sri Lanka to Chile – were able to engage with each other without eye-watering travel expenses blowing a hole in their budget.

Focus on voting at 16

Political participation was a key discussion point at the Congress, which was held on 15 July and organised by the Youth Service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) in collaboration with the Youth Parliament of Swiss Abroad (YPSA). YPSA President Jacqueline Siffer (USA) opened proceedings with a question that dominated the last “Swiss Review”: are 16-year-olds ready to vote?

This is a much-debated issue in Switzerland at present, where voting at 16 is already permitted in the canton of Glarus. Any nationwide lowering of the voting age from 18 to 16 would also apply to young Swiss living abroad. But whether the electorate would approve it in a plebiscite is still anyone’s guess.

A broad range of views were aired at the Congress – very much reflecting the discourse among young people in Switzerland. Undoubtedly, there is a great deal of interest in political participation. Those at the Congress in favour of voting at 16 argued that young



Jacqueline Siffer
expertly moderated the discussion



Marie Bloch
thinks the event was a success



Melanie Oesch
gave a yodelling masterclass



Mona-Lisa Kole
helps young people understand the issues before every federal vote

people today have already been engaged in politics for quite some time – the issue of climate change is one example. Listen to young people’s voices, and society would have a more complete representation, they said: “Teenagers often see things differently.” Political decisions taken now will have a particular bearing on their futures. The difference in maturity between a 16-year-old and an 18-year-old is negligible, so why not lower the voting age, they asked.

Others at the Congress were less than convinced, saying there was no comparison between their experiences and those of their Swiss-based counterparts. Many live in countries where there are no regular plebiscites – in contrast to Switzerland with its four voting days every year. Many also feel unready to vote on complex issues, referring to their lack of maturity and the risk of being easily swayed by other people.

Vote if you want to vote

However, the final consensus was that lowering the voting age is a good thing, because voting in Switzerland is optional. If something interests you, you vote. If it doesn’t, you don’t. One conclusion was that lowering the voting age would probably make young people more interested in exercising their political voice as such. “It would encourage them to learn more about important issues.” Voting proposals are often quite complex, but then people who reached adulthood decades ago often say the same thing.

Help from Easyvote

Swiss voting papers are certainly not the clearest. Mona-Lisa Kole told the Congress about her involvement in Easyvote, a project that aims to make politics easier for 18- to 25-year-olds. Not only is Easyvote a useful resource for Switzerland’s youth parliament, the project also publishes a brochure containing easy-to-understand information on the issues at stake before every federal vote.

Education in Switzerland

During the Congress, the Education-suisse managing director, Barbara Sulzer Smith, also gave an insight into innovative, wide ranging and accessible gateways to education in Switzerland, while students from Junior Enterprise Genève provided tips on entering the world of work – e.g. “how to write the perfect job application in Switzerland”. Then something completely different: Melanie Oesch of Swiss folk group Oesch’s die Dritten spoke to the Congress and shared some of the secrets of yodelling. She and her family delighted everyone with their music.

Marie Bloch, head of the OSA Youth Service, thinks the event was a great success. “We deepened our ties with these young people and noticed their interest and enthusiasm,” she said, adding that preparations for 2022 were already under way.