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A parliamentary group for the "Fifth Switzerland"

The spring session of the Swiss parliament saw the reconstituted Swiss Abroad parliamentary group convene for its first meeting – a fitting juncture for us to look more closely at the group.



Members of the Swiss Abroad parliamentary group often meet early in the morning at the Federal Palace. Here they are in discussion with former Federal Chancellor Walter Thurnherr. Archive photo: Danielle Liniger (2023)

Bees, the Swiss Guide and Scout Movement, and the "Fifth Switzerland" have little in common, you would think. But they each have their own parliamentary group. Parliamentary groups offer like-minded members of the National Council and Council of States the opportunity to meet, interact and share views and ideas among themselves and with representative groups from outside.

The "Fifth Switzerland" has had its own dedicated parliamentary group for the last 20 years. The Swiss Abroad parliamentary group was founded in 2004 to raise awareness of issues affecting the international mobility of Swiss nationals and to represent the political interests of the "Fifth Switzerland" more effectively. It therefore acts as an important link between the Swiss Abroad and the Swiss Federal Assembly.

New members

The composition of the group changes at the beginning of every legislative period. Some members have come and gone, but Elisabeth Schneider-Schneiter (Centre, Basel-Landschaft), Carlo Sommaruga (SP, Geneva) and Martina Bircher (SVP, Aargau) remain in the group as co-chairs. The group office – cur-

rently consisting of Nicolas Walder (Greens, Geneva), Laurent Wehrli (FDP, Vaud) and the Director of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) Ariane Rustichelli – assists them in their work. The OSA acts as a secretariat to the Swiss Abroad parliamentary group and prepares meeting agendas with the co-chairs.

Discussing the political agenda

Meetings take place four times a year, at the beginning of every parliamentary session. Led by the co-chairs, members at these meetings discuss the political motions put forward on the agenda and their implications for the "Fifth Switzerland". External experts are also regularly invited to provide the parliamentary group with an in-depth look at issues that are relevant to the Swiss Abroad.

The primary objective in the new legislative period will be to work out how best to meet the demands of the 2023–27 OSA election manifesto. Based on the manifesto, members of the Swiss Abroad parliamentary group submit motions frequently or put urgent questions to the Federal Council.

SMILLA SCHÄR, SWISSCOMMUNITY