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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

A wonderful week of snow

Last winter, snow was hard to come by at our holiday camp in Valbella. But there was no shortage this time. There was so much snow that our coach was unable to reach our camp base, and we had to alight a few hundred metres down the road. It quickly transpired that the children were much happier with all this snow than our coach driver Casi was. We were certainly going to have a great time together.


Divided into small groups based on their level of skiing or snowboarding proficiency, the children enjoyed a wonderful week of fun in the snow. Two camp leaders were designated to each group. All our staff returned back home from camp happy but exhausted, the abundant snow having ensured a varied programme of activities. We spent most days on the piste, but gave the children a mid-camp day off to go to the swimming baths or skate at the open-air ice rink. Our intrepid children also took the opportunity to try something different: a snowshoe hiking tour offering breathtaking views of Lake Heid.

Making traditional igloos was a particular highlight. The process of building them would have been quicker without help from the children, but having fun and making memories was what mattered. We said to the children that they could spend the night in their igloos. Two kids took us up on our offer

and used their igloo as a bedroom for the rest of the trip. Our staff would check up on them every night, taking the opportunity to stretch their legs and walk a lap of the camp building.

We are planning to hold two holiday camps next winter. One of them will take place in Valbella again (for children aged 12 to 14), the other in the Melch Valley in central Switzerland (for children aged eight to 14). We are considering offering beginners the opportunity to spend the first two days of their winter holiday camp at ski school, so that they pick up skiing faster, have more fun and give our camp leaders a breather. Our leaders are very professional, but not all of them are professional ski instructors. Your opinion as parents is important to us, so please let us know what you think of the idea by writing to us at info@sjas.ch.

DAVID REICHMUTH, FYSA


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90 years of camps – a successful New Year camp

The 2024 jubilee year got off to a great start with a fantastic winter camp. Snow, sun, motivated campers and leaders: all the necessary ingredients were in place for an unforgettable time in the Swiss mountains.

The New Year camp at Grächen (VS) was attended by 28 young people. They had great fun hurtling down the slopes at the Valais ski resort. For some, it was their first experience of snow, while others seized the opportunity to make their first descents of the season. There were skiing and snowboarding lessons delivered by qualified instructors for all levels from beginner to advanced, allowing everyone to get the most out of their winter adventure.

Away from the slopes, the camp leaders devised a varied programme: toasting marshmallows around a campfire, karaoke evenings and board games in the chalet. Moments filled with fun, sharing and laughter. Campers and leaders rang in the New Year in glorious sunshine and high spirits. On 1 January, they gave their tired legs a rest and visited Zermatt. The group went for a walk and took the opportunity to admire the mighty Matterhorn.

After ten days enjoying each other's company and many memorable moments, the campers returned home with memories to last a lifetime.

MARIE BLOCH, YOUTH SERVICE


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Gain initial work experience in Switzerland

Interested in an internship in Switzerland or gaining an insight into the world of work? The *educationsuisse* advisory service on education in Switzerland also provides tips on initial work experience for young Swiss Abroad.

On the farm

The sound of cowbells and the smell of hay... helping out on a farm is fun and an experience for life. The Agriviva association arranges placements lasting several weeks for young people up to the age of 25 from all over the world. In return for free board and lodging and a small amount of pocket money, you help a farming family with their daily work. More detailed information on Agriviva can be found at www.agriviva.ch or by sending an email to info@agriviva.ch.

Teaching at a school

Young students or recent graduates from countries where English, German, French, Spanish or Italian is the official national language can gain experience in the teaching profession. As native speakers they bring added value to language lessons at upper secondary schools or vocational schools and pass on the culture of their country of residence. Language assistants receive a salary which covers their living costs in Switzerland. The application period for the school year 2024/25 runs until the end of March 2024 or by agreement.

More detailed information on the Language Assistants Programme can be found at revue.link/movetiae or by sending an email to edith.funicello@movetia.ch.

Au-pair

Looking after children and helping out in the host family's household are part of everyday life as an au pair. In addition to board and lodging, there is pocket money and usually enough free time to attend a language course.

Internship

It is not easy to find an internship from abroad, but it is possible. There are various ways to gain initial work experience in Switzerland. It takes personal initiative: numerous internet portals publish vacancies that you can apply for online.

Address lists and further information on your stay in Switzerland can be obtained from *educationsuisse*.

RUTH VON GUNTEN, EDUCATIONSUISSE



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Elias, a Swiss Abroad from Australia, was drawn to the Swiss mountains. He did his Agriviva assignment in Maloja, in the canton of Grisons. Photo provided



Claire Spielmann, a Swiss Abroad from the USA, works as a language assistant at a cantonal school in Zurich. Under revue.link/claire you can read an interview with her. Photo provided

Discussion

Catholic priests, who are supposed to represent faith and morality, have sexually abused minors: this fact – incidentally disclosed by the Roman Catholic Church in Switzerland itself – has shocked many “Swiss Review” readers. Read some of their responses below.



EUGENIO WETTER NAVARRO, SANTIAGO, CHILE

I suspect and hope that the Swiss Catholic Church has dismissed all the priests who sexually abused children and reported them to the authorities and that they are now in prison like any other criminal deserves. If this is not the case, the Swiss government should act.

ADNANE BEN CHAABANE, TUNIS, TUNISIA

Two points stand out to me. First, there is the source of this information. I am even

more shocked to learn that these findings came from combing through the archives. That means people knew what was happening and saw fit to document it without sounding the alarm. That makes it three times as bad. The second point is about how human instinct is always the same. Whether within or outside the church, whatever the religion, it isn't that different to animal instinct.

ANTON MOOS, KHON KAEN, THAILAND

I am particularly unimpressed by the light tone of the editorial on this subject. I can say from personal experience, even though I have not suffered abuse myself, that suggestive behaviour by a priest harms religious feeling. Granted, abuse exists in all religious communities. I think perversion and instinctual aberrations can never be eliminated.

However, child abuse is a much bigger issue outside the church. In my view, the modern absence of religion in the lives of many people is not so much due to the abuse as to the growth over the years of “superficial” lifestyles. People are more interested in consumption, material thoughts, excessive individualism and the fun culture. It's too easy to just take it out on the church. But that also hurts those people who are sincere about living a moral life and, for example, following the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount in their everyday lives.

RICHARD TISSOT, USA

Religion is not a path to God; faith and love are. Losing one's faith over a human's bid for power over another is the true crime here.

BEULAH DALE FISCHER, GREAT BRITAIN

I am pleased that finally everyone is reacting to an event that we've suppressed for so long. I am a Catholic and have always had a good experience with the church. Now I see that I was just lucky.

The 100th Congress of the Swiss Abroad – Lucerne set for a historic celebration

Lucerne is getting ready to host the Congress of the Swiss Abroad from 11 to 13 July 2024. This, the 100th staging of the event, will go down as an extraordinary milestone in the storied history of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.

The 100th Congress is sure to be an unforgettable event in Lucerne. “Together across borders” is the slogan of this year's event, drilling down in particular on the theme of Swiss emigration. The Congress will not only examine why and how people emigrate from Switzerland, but also consider the attachment that expatriates feel to Switzerland and to family who still live there. It will also discuss technological advances in information provision and the opportunities they provide for the “Fifth Switzerland”.

It was no coincidence that the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, SwissCommunity,

chose the Lucerne Culture and Congress Centre (KKL Luzern) as the venue for its 100th Congress. KKL Luzern is more than just a building – it is an iconic cultural hub marrying contemporary architecture and Swiss tradition. It was designed by renowned architect Jean Nouvel, whose work embodies the innovative spirit and cosmopolitan values that characterise Switzerland.

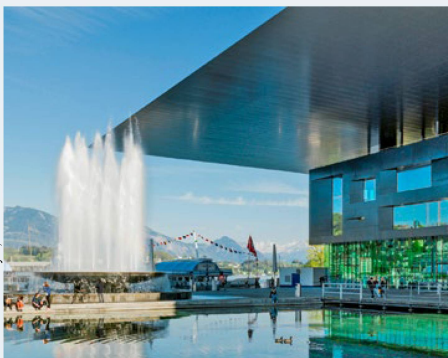


Photo: Urs Wyss, Lucerne Tourism

Brief schedule: Friday, 12 July, promises to be an extraordinary day, featuring an address from a federal government representative as well as speeches by other high-calibre speakers. It will be a time for enriching reunions and conversation among old friends. Alpine horns will reverberate on Saturday, 13 July, the day of the traditional Congress excursion. This year's destination is the Square of the Swiss Abroad in Brunnen (canton of Schwyz). Various surprises await as we celebrate the 100th staging of the Congress at this poignant landmark. Sign up for the event and read more about the schedule, the city of Lucerne and the venue KKL Luzern by scanning the QR code or visiting our website at revue.link/congress24.

MAYA ROBERT-NICOUD, SWISSCOMMUNITY



MANUEL BARRIONUEVO HAFNER, SPAIN

Of course, child abuse by members of the clergy in Switzerland is unacceptable, and not only in Switzerland. At the same time, let's not forget that the Catholic Church has done a lot of good for the community and for the culture of the country.

YVAN COCHARD, FRANCE

The Catholic Church has turned away from Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life. It is riddled with false doctrines. Tradition is placed above everything else. Unfortunately, it is not the only church to have abandoned the gospel, the good news.

GÉRARD SAUTEBIN, FRANCE

Some representatives of the Church scorn the good word that Jesus Christ imparted and taught us. They behave like the Pharisees during the lifetime of Jesus. Throughout the history of Christianity, people from the church have tarnished the image of our Christian religion in the pursuit of their personal interests, whether material, fleeting or carnal.

MARGARITHA LEIJTEN, BREDA, NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands, the issue of sexual misconduct by Catholic priests and chaplains has been out in the open for a long time. This is the first time I have read that Switzerland had covered up the issue until now and that the clergy had been sexually abusing children for years. I'm glad it's finally come to light!

SASCHA LÜTHI, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

For as long as celibacy remains mandatory, the situation will not improve. And even if the celibacy requirement is lifted, it still won't change things...

You can comment on "Swiss Review" articles in our online edition – revue.ch – at any time and read the latest comments.

Your donation goes a long way

Many of the things that the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Swiss-Community, offers are very reasonably priced or even free of charge. Donations make this possible. Those who donate appreciate the fact that they can give money for specific purposes. Here are three examples.

Ensuring the future of "Swiss Review"

The experienced editorial team at "Swiss Review" is well-versed in giving their independent journalistic take on the latest burning issues in Switzerland and making this content relatable to readers in the "Fifth Switzerland". Through your donation, you can support independent, quality journalism directly. Given that printing and mailing costs are so prohibitively high at the moment, we are particularly grateful for donations from readers of the print edition.

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Giving young people the chance to make memories

Our Youth Service offers a range of fun-packed summer and winter camps that allow 15 to 18 year olds to deepen their connection to Switzerland. These camps also enable young Swiss Abroad to come together from all corners of the world and spend an enriching time in each other's company. The Youth Service keeps participation costs intentionally low and provides discounts to financially less advantaged recipients. It can do this thanks to the donations it receives.

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Enabling us to provide valuable advice

Leaving your home country and making a new life in a different country is no easy matter. Our Legal Department offers free advice to Swiss Abroad. We also represent the interests of the "Fifth Switzerland" at a political level in Switzerland. This is in keeping with our commitment as a recognised non-profit organisation – for which we rely on funding. You can support us through a donation or a bequest (click on the following link for more information on bequests: [revue.link/bequests](https://www.revue.ch/bequests)).

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Florian Baccaunaud is the person to contact for general questions about sponsorship, donations and bequests.

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