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CSA Election: Insights from the Pilot Project in Australia

Last year, the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) established a working group to develop guidelines for democratic digital elections, aiming to enhance the representativeness of the CSA. The group can draw on the experience of countries where direct elections have been conducted previously. This article provides an overview of the changes and experiences made during the OSA pilot project in Australia in 2017.

Australia holds the third-largest Swiss expatriate community outside Europe and is allocated four seats in the CSA. Before 2017, the nomination and election of delegates were primarily internal matters, decided by committees or presidents of a few clubs.

The 2017 elections revolutionised this process on three fronts. Firstly, the call for nominations reached all Swiss whose email address was registered with the Consulate General, as well as readers of the “Swiss Review” and relevant Swiss online channels. Secondly, all Swiss citizens above 18, registered with an email at the Consulate, were eligible to vote, totalling 14,800 people. Thirdly, the elections were carried out electronically, through the then-still-existing e-voting platform of the canton of Geneva.

The campaign utilised a variety of local communication platforms and the “Swiss Review”. However crucial in achieving the wide reach was the Consulate General. They sent out two emails to all registered Swiss over 18: the call for nominations and later the call to vote.

The outcome was remarkable, as for the first time the number of candidates exceeded available seats - twice over. In the elections, 1,100 Swiss seized the opportunity to vote, resulting in a 7.4% participation rate. While this number may still appear modest, it is a big increase from the estimated 0.05% - 0.3% achieved previously.

Having more candidates than available seats in openly conducted elections implies a competition for votes. To get a vote, people must know who we are and what we stand for and have confidence in our ability to fulfil this role well. While this places pressure on the candidates, it provides voters with a genuine choice. Additionally, the opportunity to vote was extended to 14,800 people, not just a handful of club committees.

Overall, the pilot project in 2017 was a great opportunity for Swiss in Australia to democratically choose their delegates and for us to gain legiti-



In Australia the pilot project revolutionised the election process for the Council of the Swiss Abroad: All of a sudden, 14,800 Swiss had the opportunity to vote – and no longer just a handful of club representatives.

Photo: iStock

macy as the representatives of the Swiss community in Australia.

Based on its experience, Australia continued with direct elections in 2021 and is planning to offer a digital and democratic election process again in 2025.

CARMEN TROCHSLER, CSA DELEGATE, AUSTRALIA

For questions and feedback on the topic, please contact:
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E-voting for elections to the CSA

An e-voting system developed and tested numerous times by Berne University of Applied Sciences (BFH) is ready to be used for digital elections to the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA). The CSA's dedicated working group announced this news on 14 March 2024 at an information event at the Federal Palace in Berne. Eric Dubuis, a professor at BFH who specialises in e-voting, told everyone present that the system would be made available for the CSA elections, at virtually no cost. Speaking in Berne on behalf of the working group, Noel Frei said that he now hoped as many regions as possible would express interest in using the system.

Photos of the meeting are available in the online edition of “Swiss Review” at www.revue.ch. (MUL)