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REPORT FROM HEINZ LEUENBERGER

Most compatriots have little or no knowledge of the functions and workings of the Council for the Swiss Abroad (CSA). Neither did I until I came into the position of Delegate a few months ago. It has taken a fair bit of reading up to come to grips with it all.

The whole set-up starts with the "Auslandschweizerdienst" which is a part of the Swiss Foreign Affairs Department (Eidgenössisches Departement des Äussern: EDA). Since early 1995, this section is headed by Minister Thomas Füglister. He succeeded Minister Bodenmüller who most of you will remember when he visited New Zealand about 3 years ago to explain the workings of the AHV/IV (old age pension). Business emanating from Foreign Affairs comes before the Council for the Swiss Abroad, which is made up by the Delegates. The Council meets twice yearly, in March and August. The August Meeting is well publicized, it being in conjunction with the Congress for the Swiss Abroad. Last year the Congress drew 550 participants. The main points under discussion at the Congress were:

- * Participation of the fifth Switzerland in federal Elections and Referenda.
- * The position of the Swiss abroad with regard to the AHV/IV.
- * The reform of the Health Insurance laws.
- * Recognition of trade / professional certificates / Diplomas.
- * Revision of the Lex Friedrich law (foreign ownership of land).

Other points which brought about spontaneous discussions were:

- * Changes to the diplomatic and consular network as those may affect Compatriots.
- * Personal freedom within Europe (EEC business mainly).
- * Switzerland's image abroad.
- * The setting-up of the Swiss Abroad place in Brunnen (SZ).

The Council, in its capacity as the leading organ for the Swiss abroad, took leave of a "directional image" for the "Swiss Review" which is being produced between it and the Confederation (Eidgenossenschaft).

Of some considerable interest no doubt is the Budget the Council works

under. According to the Accounts as per 31. Dec. 1995, the Income amounts to SFR 1.93 Mil, and produced a modest surplus of SFR 8692.-. The income is derived to 40% by direct Government subsidy with the remaining 60% coming from a variety of sources. On the other side of the ledger, just over half the Budget is spent on salaries for the 14 staff at the Secretariat, plus a host of expenses incurred in the running of the Council and the Secretariat.

Associated with the Council is the Committee overseeing the 16 Swiss Schools in Europe and the Americas. The costs of maintaining those schools is met by Government subsidy, donations from Industry and Commerce as well as school fees.

The Committee also supervises the advancement and training of young Compatriots from abroad. There is even an organisation for the advancement of the Council for the Swiss Abroad.

Furthermore the Committee runs the Solidarity Fund, which at present has 8780 members and a capital of SFR 67 Mil. Finally the Committee is also in charge of setting-up the Swiss Abroad place in Brunnen. This small meadow is referred to as the Capital of the Swiss Abroad.

In my next communication, I will be explaining the workings of the AHV/IV Insurance scheme as this may affect some of our younger compatriots.

Yours: H. Leuenberger (Delegate).

YOUTH EXCHANGE - NEW ZEALAND

Report from Marie-Theres Melville-Schöpfer

I am pleased to advise that a Co-ordinator for the Youth Exchange - New Zealand Project has been appointed by the Auslandschweizer Sekretariat, Bern. It is:

Mrs. Nicole HELSDON, 68A
Marella Drive, Red Beach, Orewa
Ph/Fax 09 426 0927

Thanks to all those who expressed an interest in this Project.

If anyone wishes any further information on the Youth Exchange Programme, or is prepared to act as an exchange host, PLEASE contact Mrs. Helsdon.

Marie-Theres Melville-Schöpfer

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SWISS PTT TO BECOME A BANK

As if Switzerland did not have enough banks already, here come the PTT who want to become a bank too. This is a rather strange evolution when you think that the New Zealand Post Office recently sold off its banking arm to other banks whilst in Switzerland its counterpart, the PTT, are going into the opposite direction.

On the other hand, the Swiss PTT have always acted as a sort of clearing house for some 1.6 million firms and private people through their postal accounts (Post Konto) service.

It is estimated that at any given time, there are some 60 billion SFR sitting in these postal accounts and the idea is now to make use of some of this money in form of loans to account holders. So the PTT could well become in future a lending institution.

Needless to say that the existing banks are unanimously opposed to the PTT's move mainly on the grounds that the PTT counter staff are neither trained nor in a position of properly handling loan applications nor would they have the time to do so over the counter next to all their other duties.

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