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Report from the Swiss Abroad Congress in Davos August 2001

(Report by Heinz Leuenberger, our Delegate for Swiss Abroad.)

This was the second Swiss Abroad Council Session I've attended, which took place in Davos, a holiday resort in Canton Grisons, where earlier this year protestors were demanding an end to globalisation. Mr Joseph Deiss, Minister of Foreign Affairs, said that following much discussion about globalisation then, he was now finding a "globalised Switzerland" in a totally different mood.

The Council had a heavy agenda. Matters concerning the revision of political rights; a new directive in the field of sickness insurance; the introduction of the Euro (currency) and its consequences; the ever present question on how to finance the Swiss schools abroad, which seem to be sliding more and more in the 'red'; the importance of educating foreign students representing a very high export potential; and the still much discussed problem of how to compensate the so-called 'Algeria Swiss' (this relates back to the war of independence in Algeria about 30 years ago, where Swiss nationals lost all their possessions).

Once again, strong emphasis was placed on the importance of exercising our political rights. Mr Deiss, whose job it is to bring about an early entry into the UN, put an impassioned plea to Delegates to encourage their Society members to register and vote to support him in this venture. It is likely that a referendum may be held by mid next year, as both Chambers of Parliament have voted in support, indicating most Parties are in favour of joining. It was noted that other than the special status of the Vatican, Switzerland is now the only European country outside of the Organi-

I also took quite a bundle of recent Helvetia magazines with me to Switzerland, to hand out to Delegates from other English speaking countries. Well, I should have brought a lot more, as there was much interest in the activities of the Clubs and Society, and the presenwas very much admired for its professionalism. Even a representative of *Radio Switzerland* asked for a copy, and one also went to Ambassador Walter Thurnheer, who will be visiting New Zealand at the end of the year.

In General Business, and American Delegate, a lady from Scotland, and I, voiced our concerns very strongly over the lack of English translation facilities. All business is carried out in high German, and is also translated word for word in French. But many delegates have problems to effectively follow either language. In a later meeting with Dr Wyder, Director of the Secretariat in Berne, I was able to discuss this concern, and the matter will now be looked at at the next Director's Meeting.

Report to be continued next issue.....





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