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News From The Secretariat

1st July 2002 marked the 10th Anniversary of the introduction of the postal ballot for federal elections and referenda. This milestone had its beginnings in 1986, when then national councillor Mr Georg Stucky from Zug introduced the relevant motion. It's very appropriate that Mr Stucky is now the president of the Swiss Abroad Organisation (SAO).

In a recent interview with Georg Stucky he analysed the first 10 years of participation of voters from abroad. Some interesting results came to light: accordingly the so-called fifth Switzerland has become a very strong component of Switzerland's political scene.

The present 80,000 registered voters have far surpassed the originally expected registrations to the point that they now have become the fourth biggest Canton. It may therefore not be too surprising that the votes from abroad played a very significant outcome in the recent decision to enter the UN. Figures from the Cantons of Geneva, Vaud and Lucerne, where votes from abroad are counted separately, show that the support from the Swiss abroad averaged just under a whopping 80%, while support from within Switzerland itself was only 54.6%. As for the Cantons in favour (Standemehr) this was won by the barest of margins, namely ONE. AN analysis shows that the "Auslandluzerner" carried the day! Even though postal voting had come a long way, administrative problems still have to be addressed and resolved. Problems such as an automatic voter registry entry, a centralised voter register rather than one based on one's home country (Gemeinde). For countries with poor mail delivery systems, alternatives have to be found. Internet voting is also still under investigation.

Fixed Dates For Federal Referenda

Up until the present, the Federal Government fixed the four dates on which Referenda were to be held on a year to year basis. Following discussions over an "abstract" plan with interested parties, the go-ahead was given and dates are now being set until 2010. I don't want to bore you with the details of this new plan except to say that it's indeed "abstract".

Federal Elections 2003

Wishes of the fifth Switzerland Article 40 of the Federal Constitution promotes the relationship among compatriots living abroad and the home country. The prerequisite is the compulsory immatriculation abroad.

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) through its representatives the (Delegates) represent appr 600,000 registered compatriots, approximately 10% of the Swiss population. In view of Federal Elections on 19 Oct 2003 the OSA will submit the following matters of interest for the legislative 2003/07 to the various political and other interested parties.

1) The promotion of education of young Swiss Abroad. The simplification of acceptance to places of education and learning as well as the recognition of equal foreign diplomas and study times of equal merit and a guarantee of appropriate support for the 17 Swiss schools abroad through the State (Bund) and Cantons. The funding of Swiss schools in places where there is a sufficient scholastic requirement and a qualified need for a Swiss presence.

2) The simplification of the political participation for the Swiss Abroad. Inclusion of the Swiss Abroad in the development of political parties by way of international sections as well as via the Internet. The promotion of Swiss Abroad candidates for the Federal Assembly. The removal of the remaining hurdles in the execution of political rights from abroad. The centralisation of the voter registry at Cantonal level and the rapid realisation of electronic voting.

3) The expansion of the flow of information between Switzerland and its citizens living abroad. Adequate consideration for the needs of information regarding the revision of the Radio and TV legislation, in particular the obligation of the Schweizer Radio Gesellschaft (SRG) for the production of specific programmes, including to have such programmes produced in the respective foreign language. The availability of sufficient finance information for the Swiss Abroad, in particular for those entitled to vote.

This information to be made through the Swiss Revue. Increased use of the lines of communication already established with the Swiss communities, namely to inform the leaders of Swiss Societies and other Swiss institutions as to their role of distributors of information concerning the "Fifth Switzerland".

4) Optimising the consular care for

Swiss communities. Realisation of the Swiss Abroad (Project Vera) while retaining sufficient personnel and the absolute safeguarding of personal data. Development of the net foreign representation and provide adequate care for the Swiss communities. The selection of Honorary Consuls familiar with Swiss affairs as well as the local Swiss communities, providing a better job description and adequate instructions as well as an improved control of performance.

5) The promotion of the Swiss presence Abroad. Continuing improving our presence and image throughout the world and keeping in mind the possible repercussions from international decisions. Systematic co-operation with our Swiss abroad and their institutions. The use of infrastructure and connection with schools abroad as platforms for the promotion and care of our presence.

6) Facilitation of international mobility. Inform the general public of the nominal worth of the international mobility as well as about the economic, social, political and cultural significance to the personal freedom for our country. The total and lasting implementation, both internationally and external of the agreement between Switzerland and the EU with regard to personal mobility. The improvement of international mobility



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