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88th Auslandschweizer-Kongress, 20-22 August, St Gallen

The theme of the conference was one fundamental to Swiss society - democracy - and more particularly, how the interests of Swiss nationals living abroad can be better and more directly represented in political decision-making in their homeland. Some 130,000 of the nearly 700,000 Swiss Abroad are enrolled to vote - that's the equivalent of a Canton like Neuenberg. Yet because the issues which generally impact directly on them are spread across a number of Government Departments, there is little focus on the particular concerns that affect Swiss abroad..

This topic had already been introduced at the Auslandschweizerat in March, so at this sitting papers were presented which progressed the thinking. Topics included:

- the form of new legislation that would be required and how to progress that;
- the appropriate part of the political system to be represented in (directly in the Bundesrat, or as a 27th canton?);
- what changes would be required in the Auslandschweizerorganisation and in Swiss clubs and societies internationally, to legitimise their voice; and
- e-voting.

The idea of a 27th canton was dismissed as being not viable politically or practically. The Rat voted to continue work on developing legislation that recognises the political rights of Ausland Schweiz.

On the political front, President of the AuslandSchweiz Parliamentary Group Filippo Lombardi and Foreign Affairs Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey were supportive, with Calmy-Rey undertaking to set up an Interdepartmental Working Group to look at the coordination of Departments on matters affecting Swiss Abroad, and at the development of new legislation.

Another critical part of such a future was also launched at the Conference: the SwissCommunity.org website which is a platform linking Swiss abroad with each other and their home country. Not e-voting - but a major e-step!

To read the conference papers - email: carolyn.lane@vodafone.net.nz, or phone Mani Zust (04 905 0017) after 20 Sept.

Look at www.Swisscommunity.org, and sign up as a member.

The Swiss Club Christchurch is celebrating its 50th Anniversary – participate and enjoy!

Over centuries immigrants from Switzerland came to New Zealand for business or private reasons and fell in love with this beautiful country. Fifty years ago the Christchurch Swiss Club was founded and now it is time to pay tribute to the club's proud long term existence.

On Saturday October 23rd we are celebrating this event in traditional style with Swiss people from the South & North Island and with Kiwis who have links to Switzerland. We expect well over 100 guests and strongly believe the Swiss Ambassador to New Zealand will be among them.

The event will take place in the Hagley Netball Function Centre, 455 Hagley Avenue, Christchurch, starting at 7pm and going until midnight. You will not only be served a traditional aperitif followed by a delicious buffet dinner but can also enjoy an entertaining evening among old and new friends.

Tickets for this event are on sale from now until October 10th. The price for a ticket is NZD 50.00 - one dollar for each year of the club's existence. Included in this price is the meal and entertainment. Please note that reasonably priced drinks are available at the venue but are not included in the ticket. BYO is not permitted.

Jan Tonascia, President Christchurch Swiss Club

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