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Organisation of the Swiss Abroad

Report on ASO conference in Lausanne 17-19th August 2012 (by Othmar Hebler)

330 people from 40 countries attended the congress, 70 of them elected representatives. 700,000 Swiss live outside Switzerland, that's nearly 10%. The ASO is pushing very hard to get e-voting implemented, hopefully by 2015, and is also trying to make the Swiss abroad the 27th canton of Switzerland.

Swiss banks are continuing with charging or even closing the bank accounts of Swiss abroad. ASO is working very hard to get some resolution on this for their members. The Aargauer Kantonalbank, for example, is charging accounts with less than 150,000 Sfr. 40.00 per month. Now with lots of money flowing into Switzerland and interest rates historically low, you can get mortgages for a ten year term for 1.6%.

Bundesrat Didier Burkhalter (head of Swiss abroad) was talking about closing more Embassies around the world, as the internet makes it a lot faster to communicate anywhere in

the world. This means travellers have to take a lot more responsibility for their own travels and actions.

There were two guest speakers at the conference. One was Elmar Mock, the inventor of the Swatch, who talked about how Swatch turned around the misfortunes of the Swiss watch industry. The other speaker was the Nobel Price Winner of chemistry 2002, Mr. Kurt Wüthrich. He talked about the mutations of the Bird and Swine flu.

Lots of political parties attended in order to try and enrol new members.

After the conference, I visited with my parents the "Auslandschweizer Platz" in Brunnen on the edge of the "Vierwaldstättersee", a place well worth visiting if you're ever in Switzerland.

If you like any more information on the conference, visit www.swissinfo.ch.

A bit of background information

ASO stands for Auslandschweizer Organisation or Organisation for the Swiss Abroad (OSA). According to its website, 135,000 Swiss nationals living abroad are registered on the electoral roll, allowing them to exercise their democratic right to vote. This is the equivalent of the electorate of a Canton such as Neuchâtel - a very sizeable electorate and one that continues to grow. It is therefore a vital task to protect the interests of these citizens abroad.

This is the role of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), the voice of the Fifth Switzerland and recognised as such by the Federal authorities. Even without this primary political body, the Fifth Switzerland would

still have a link with Parliament thanks to the inter-party parliamentary group "The Swiss Abroad", which has about 100 MPs and is sensitive to the cause of the Swiss living outside the country.

The Organisation of the Swiss abroad (OSA) actively promotes the political rights of Swiss people living abroad and encourages them to get onto the electoral register, so that they can participate in political debates and keep themselves informed about votes and elections. The OSA is also active in promoting electronic voting, a highly important democratic instrument for Swiss citizens distributed around the four corners of the world.

Source: www.aso.ch

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