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# ASO Report - Peter Ehrler

First of all I would like to thank all of the Swiss Members who were at the AGM in Hamilton and gave Peter Canziani and myself the Vote of Confidence and elected us as your Representatives for New Zealand.

Below I have tried to sum up the OSA's Annual Report 2012, approved by the Council of the Swiss Abroad. As the 42 page report is only available in German and some parts really technical, it has not been easy to translate it into English.

## Federal Council Law for the Swiss Abroad (Auslandschweizergesetz)

Under the Federal Constitution Article 40, the Federal Council is legally obliged to promote the relationship between Swiss abroad among themselves, as well as that between the Swiss abroad and Switzerland. Unfortunately, apart from a few decrees, there is no comprehensive law for this.

In 2011, the Ticinese Senator Filippo Lombardi submitted a parliamentary initiative to create a law on the Swiss abroad. In May 2012, a sub-committee of the Political Institutions Committee of the Council of States took up work and is currently drafting this law. The Committee is headed by Senator Filippo Lombardi.

The OSA has been involved right from the beginning and was able to contribute substantially in terms of concept and needs of the Swiss abroad. The OSA has presented the committee with detailed documentation concerning the international mobility of the Swiss and the possible future development of Swiss Foreign Politics, including various proposals for the alignment of present laws and regulations to meet future needs.

The main objective the OSA's contribution is: A coherent, unified political framework applicable to all levels, National, Cantonal, as well as Communal. It is important for the OSA that the objectives of Swiss Foreign

Politics are clearly defined, a coherent strategy developed and implemented, and that resources are properly coordinated, contradictions eliminated, and synergies properly used to improve the outcomes of the political decision-making for the "Fifth Switzerland". This has become necessary with the ever increasing mobility of Swiss citizens. The "Fifth Switzerland", with well over 715,000 living abroad, is a factor which Switzerland cannot underestimate in terms of international trade, science, research, culture, society and politics. Thus, it is important for this new law, now in the draft stage, to be implemented.

## 20 Years Voting for Swiss Abroad

2012 marks the 20th Anniversary for Swiss abroad being able to vote at the Federal Council Level (Bundesebene). In 1992, this key topic which the OSA had focused on since its formation, was passed into law and voting for the Swiss abroad became a reality. The change of law was initiated by former OSA President Georg Stucki in 1989, when he submitted a parliamentary initiative. In 1992, about 14,000 Swiss abroad registered to be able to vote. In 2011, this number grew to over 143,000.

A study by the Zürcher Forschungsinstitut has shown that the Swiss abroad vote very similar to the Swiss living in Switzerland, except when the topic to be voted on has something to do with Switzerland opening itself to the rest of the world. Here, the Swiss abroad are more open to changes.

## E-Voting for all

The general introduction of E-Voting is one of the current topics the OSA is working on. 13 Kantons within Switzerland now use this system. In 2011, the Kantons of AG, BS, GR, and SG made it possible for the Swiss abroad to vote electronically via the Internet. In 2012, the OSA launched a petition that all Kantons should introduce E-Voting as soon as possible, in the hope that at the time of the elections in 2015, all

Swiss abroad will be able to vote electronically. The petition was handed over to the Swiss Foreign Minister Didier Burkhalter with 15,000 signatures.

## Swiss Banks

In 2012, there was not much movement concerning the difficulties which the Swiss abroad are experiencing with Swiss Banks in Switzerland. This is of great concern to the OSA. From 2008, Swiss Banks have started to introduce increased fees for all foreigners, including the Swiss abroad. Also, Swiss abroad residing in certain countries have been advised to close their accounts in Switzerland. After intervention by the OSA, the Swiss Price Surveillance Authority (Preisüberwacher) examined 32 different Swiss financial institutions and came to the conclusion that there are substantial price differences between them. It is therefore worthwhile comparing different banks to find a "reasonably" priced one to work with. The present situation is simply not acceptable for the OSA. In the Spring Meeting of 2012, the OSA formed a resolution in which it urged and called upon political institutions and the Banks to find a satisfactory solution for Swiss abroad who have a clear conscience in terms of their respective tax authorities.

## Swiss all over the World 2012 (Fifth

Region	Swiss Population	Change since 2011
America	175'954	+1'335
Europe	442'620	+7'418
Asia	45'793	+2'465
Africa	20'696	+533
Oceania	30'647	+321

## Switzerland)

*Peter Ehrler, Elected Council Member of the Swiss Abroad representing New*

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