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ASO Report - 91st Congress of the Swiss Abroad

With the venue place Davos presenting itself with the best summer weather, the 91st Congress of the Swiss Abroad and the Council of the Swiss Abroad held their meeting from 16 – 18 August 2013. 96 Council Members attended the Council of the Swiss Abroad meeting.

The Elections for the Legislature Period 2013 – 2017 were held for the Executives and Members. Elected Members were confirmed. The President Mr. Jacques-Simon Eggly provided a review of the past Legislature Period and specifically the last 12 months. This and the discussions by the Delegates can be summarised as follows:

- ✦ An update was given concerning the Federal Council Law for the Swiss Abroad (Auslandsschweizergesetz) Constitution Article 40, which is now in Parliament and making good progress to the satisfaction of the OSA.
- ✦ The OSA is doing all it can to make available the option of electronic voting to all Swiss Abroad. At the current time, there is a lot of work being done behind the scenes. The aim is to have electronic voting available for all Swiss Abroad for the Elections in 2015 and to have it completely institutionalised globally at the latest by 2017.
- ✦ There has been little progress with the Swiss Banks and the Swiss Abroad. The Swiss Government cannot interfere in the service cost structure of the various banks. Very harsh words were directed at the Swiss Banks by the Delegates. Unfortunately, it is presently up to the Swiss Abroad to deal directly with their bank about the fees.
- ✦ Postfinanz seems to be the only Swiss bank which is currently acting in a manner which I would call "half way normal" in relating with the Swiss Abroad, although this might also change as Postfinanz will shortly be issued with a normal Bank licence and thus changes might also become imminent, probably to the disadvantage of the Swiss Abroad. I will try to keep you updated if I hear anything new.
- ✦ It was announced that the Director of OSA, Rudolf Wyder, has handed in his resignation. He has been working for the OSA since 1985 and has been its Director since 1987. His departure will be a great loss for the Organisation.
- ✦ It has been brought to the Delegates' attention that the University of Geneva, together with the OSA as Partner, is planning to realise a "Swiss Abroad Museum". This is all still at an initial stage of development. When completed, participation from the Swiss Clubs and Swiss Organisations Abroad will be welcomed.
- ✦ There was also a major discussion, dismay and frustration among the Delegates over the closure of Swiss Consulates all over the world. The Delegates made it clear that the shrinking network of Swiss Consulates and Embassies abroad makes it very difficult for many people to obtain services such as new passports, registration of personal details such as births, visa applications, etc. It also has a negative influence on diplomatic relations, as well as financial and economic development within the affected countries. The dismay and

frustration of the OSA and the possible implications will be relayed to the Swiss Federal Council (Bundesrat). We in New Zealand can call ourselves fortunate to have all the services we need available at our door steps. The "mobile" Passport service that the Embassy has offered in the past and will hopefully continue to offer in the future is something that not many other Embassies around the world have made available to their Swiss Citizens. At the conference, I have heard of examples where people need up to 48 hours (Yes 48 hours!) by train, bus and boat to reach the next Swiss Embassy or Consulate.

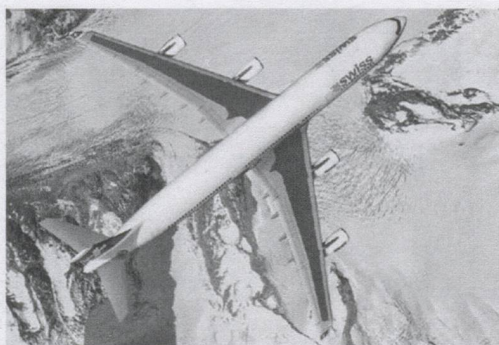
- ✦ The main emphasis for the next Legislature Period 2013 – 2017 will be on making certain that the discussions in Parliament (both Chambers) and thereafter the introduction of the Federal Council Law for the Swiss Abroad, Constitution Article 40, is to the full satisfaction of the OSA. The second major task will be to do all that is in the power of the OSA to make electronic voting available for all Swiss Abroad as soon as possible.

The next Meeting (Frühjahrssitzung) will be held in Bern on Saturday March 22nd 2014

The 92nd Congress of the Swiss Abroad and the Council of the Swiss Abroad will take place in Baden AG between the 15th and 17th August 2014

Peter Ehrler

Elected Council Member of the Swiss Abroad representing New Zealand.



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