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## 92nd Congress of the Swiss Abroad

*The Congress of the Swiss Abroad was held in Baden between 15-17 August 2014 and was attended by about 90 delegates from around the world.*

### Swiss Banks

At the meeting, the Council of the Swiss Abroad called on the government to ensure their right to a savings account in Switzerland. The vice president of the assembly said the time was right to push ahead with demands for the majority state owned Post Finance to provide Swiss expatriates with an account to keep their savings, pension or other declared funds, as well as to make it possible for them to take out mortgages for their properties in Switzerland. Once again, there were many complaints by delegates about the harsh and discriminatory treatment by Swiss banks. Several speakers said the Swiss Abroad were "collateral damage" of the mistakes and criminal doings made by many banks in the past.

A resolution put forward by the US delegation was passed, calling on the government to delegate the following resolution to PostFinance:

The Government shall assign PostFinance to enable Swiss living Abroad to open, obtain and maintain:

- Investment accounts for declared money
  - Investment accounts for the old age pension (3. Säule)
  - Investment accounts for schooling and vocational training
  - Investment accounts for money earned and/or inherited in Switzerland
  - Mortgages or building loans for properties in Switzerland
- There is definitely political pressure building up in Bern. A leading consumer protection group will reportedly also investigate ways to force Swiss banks to give all Swiss citizens access to an account and provide them with certain financial services.

### The Law for the SwissAbroad (Auslandsschweizergesetz)

The Law for the Swiss Abroad was commented on by Mr Lombardi, State Councillor. The Council of States has already approved the draft and it is expected that the National Council will follow suit later this year, therefore the law should be enacted in 2015. The new law will replace eight [8] previous pieces of legislation. The Assembly however wishes to maintain the mandatory registration for all expatriates. The assembly adopted a resolution calling for maintenance of the mandatory

registration of expatriates. The delegates maintained that it was crucial to know the whereabouts of individual expatriates in cases of conflicts and disasters.

### E-Voting

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) is pushing for the introduction of E-voting for all expatriate citizens for the 2015 parliamentary elections. Currently about 155,000 Swiss citizens have registered to take part in ballot box decisions, including regular votes on issues or in elections. By next year, about 14 Cantons (including Canton Zurich and Glarus) will have introduced E-Voting.

### ECOPOP Referendum

The delegates voted unanimously against the ECOPOP Referendum after a lengthy presentation by a representative from the referendum committee, as well as issuing a resolution opposing the referendum. The referendum has the aim to reduce the flow of immigration into Switzerland to 0.2% per year. Both chambers of the Swiss parliament recommend that Swiss citizens vote against the referendum. Voting will be on the 30th of November 2014.

(Note: ECOPOP (Association ECOlogie et POPulation) is a Swiss Environmental Protection organisation dealing with the impact of population growth on natural resources)

### Revision of the Swiss Abroad Education Act

At the moment, the Swiss Abroad Education Act is undergoing a complete revision in Parliament. The OSA has released a statement and made recommendations. Currently, there are 17 Swiss schools abroad. These provide facilities for a total of 7,500 students, of which 1,800 are Swiss. Today, many former students occupy key political and financial positions. The Swiss schools are well established in their host countries and have a reputation for providing high educational quality.

The next Congress of the Swiss Abroad will be held between the 14th - 16th of August 2015 in Geneva.

Peter Ehrler

Elected Council Member of the Swiss Abroad representing New Zealand.

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