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94th Congress of the Swiss Abroad

This year's Council meeting coincided with the centenary celebration of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, which has its head office in Berne. The celebrations took place on the square in front of the Federal Parliament House attended by the Swiss Federal Councillor, Didier Burkhalter. Fortunately big tents and marquees were put in place, as a deluge descended upon the guests, at least for some time.

The Council meeting of the Swiss Abroad had a long agenda to go through and I only highlight some of the items.

1. Election modus of the members of the Council of the Swiss Abroad:

With a new law on the Swiss Abroad in place, the Swiss authorities aim at a very democratic and transparent election modus of the 120 delegates from all over the world. In some countries only the Swiss Club Presidents elect the delegates, in some countries only members and Presidents of Swiss Clubs, and in a few countries all registered Swiss can vote. In about 55% of countries, only Swiss Club members and Presidents have a vote.

The ultimate aim of the Swiss authorities and of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad is that in future all registered Swiss Abroad (also those who are registered to vote in Switzerland) are empowered to elect the delegates. This means that the e-voting system has to be in place. The authorities have been persuaded that this would be the most democratic way for the Delegates to be elected. The question remains whether the Swiss Clubs can have a vote or have a say in the process. A committee has been formed to work on that proposal. As you know, in New Zealand, in the past at least, the Delegates were elected at the Swiss Society's AGM every 4 years. The Swiss Authorities and the OSA would like to delegate the election process to the Head Organisation of each country, which would mean no change in our election modus.

The OSA elections for 2017 will probably be held worldwide according to "old systems" but in some countries test runs will be conducted based on the electronic voting system. Just for your information, the Council of the Swiss Abroad has 140 members of which 20 are so-called appointed inland members from Switzerland, usually persons who have lived abroad and who have been helpful for the cause of the Swiss Abroad

(like previous Ambassadors). The other 120 members are the delegates from all countries who are empowered to have a delegate.

2. The past and future of the OSA:

The centenary of the OSA was highlighted on many occasions, past, present and future discussed at length. The new law on the Swiss Abroad enacted in 2015 is certainly a milestone. As to the future, based on an extensive survey, the following goals and aims were set:

- Endeavour that all registered Swiss Abroad have the possibility to elect their delegates to the Council of the SA. The aim is to have a very transparent and democratic process enabling widest participation.
- OSA to foster and emphasise the political participation and intensify the contact with the Swiss cantons and the federal authorities to enable electronic voting as soon as possible by the Swiss Abroad.
- Presence of the OSA in Switzerland and abroad:
It is recognised that the OSA has to gain more in importance in Switzerland as well as abroad and has to intensify its political campaigns. This is to be done through all available communication channels and through the Swiss Representatives worldwide.
Organise promotion campaigns also in Switzerland to highlight the importance of the OSA with local Councils, Universities, and distribute information on the OSA.
- The OSA will assist the Swiss Clubs abroad to communicate closer with each other, exchange information and use common platform and websites and exchange experience and information. See information under "SwissCommunity.org".

3. Budgetary Measures:

Federal Authorities are still on a cost cutting exercise and therefore the Swiss Review, now available in printed version and also in electronic form, will only be available in E Form.

Changes are also to be expected on the social security front but it has been assured that the voluntary old age insurance will continue to be available for those who do not live in and are not registered in EU countries. Apparently only 5% of the Swiss living abroad are members of the voluntary old age insurance scheme.

4. Literature:

A welcome contribution from down under was submitted by OSA delegate Roland Isler, Melbourne. He has published a beautifully illustrated booklet with letters from a Swiss emigrant to Victoria, J. J. Locher from Speicher, who was looking for his fortune in the Victorian Goldfields in the 1850s. It is titled "Nach Australien! Briefe eines Ausgewanderten". The well-researched booklet is also based on an earlier publication from 1857 in St. Gallen. The publication was well received and was mentioned several times as a valuable contribution by OSA President, Remo Gysin. The booklet is dedicated to OSA 2016 on the occasion of its centenary. This book is also available from Amazon as a Kindle eBook.

Rudolf Wyder, former Director and CEO of OSA in Berne (1987-2013) also had a successful book launch for the OSA Centenary Celebration, "Globale Schweiz, Die Entdeckung der Auslandschweizer". This well researched and documented volume gives a pertinent historic aspect of the Swiss Abroad and of the OSA. The book highlights the various emigration waves as well as the fate of many Swiss colonies abroad, also in wartimes, and highlights the current political initiatives taken by the OSA for the benefit of the Swiss Abroad. The publisher is Stämpfli Verlag.

Both authors have to be congratulated for their initiative and dedication.

5. The Congress in 2017

The Congress 2017 will be held in Basel on Saturday August 19, the Council meeting on the day before, Friday August 18, 2017. The chosen topic for the Congress will be the Dialogue between the Swiss and the Swiss Abroad, both forming one entity. It is noted that the Swiss Abroad view Switzerland often in a different way to the Swiss themselves and vote differently. About 60% of all Swiss Abroad live in an EU country, 74% of the Swiss Abroad are double citizens. Emphasis on this occasion will also be put on the inclusion of the young Swiss into the equation between Swiss Abroad and the Swiss.

The above has been printed with the courtesy and approval of Beat Knoblauch, Australian ASO Delegate.

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

Report on Meeting of the Council of the Swiss Abroad 5 August 2016 in Bern – also 100 Years of OSA

Prepared by Peter Canziani, Deputy Delegate

When we arrived in Bern on Friday at 8am it was raining pretty heavily. We made our way to the Bundeshaus and I settled in at the Nationalratssaal for the meeting which started at 9am. The meeting was opened with a speech from Herr Remo Gysin, President of the OSA and Nationalrat. There were approximately 120 Delegates attending from all over the world.

The morning session involved the E-Voting and 100 years OSA. They also thanked the members who came from as far away as Australia, New Zealand, South America and South Africa. The Director from Swissinfo, Dr Peter Schibli addressed the meeting too about the E-Voting. The OSA team was thanked for their attendance and involvement. There was some information about the Swiss Review – there should be Fr100,000 saved up to keep on printing the Swiss Review. It is also possible to read the Swiss Review online! The problem has not been solved as yet – a decision will be made by the end of this year or the beginning of next year. There was a report on the progress to the AHV/IV reform for the easing of amounts paid to the voluntary contributions to AHV.

After the lunch-break (which was outside in the rain under some shelter) the afternoon session was all about "Richtlinien zur Wahl des Ausland Schweizerrates". I would need about 20 pages to go through the whole session, but if you have a PC you can go to the website, either swissinfo.ch or the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA). There is all the information from

the 100 year meeting. Some interesting points were: Countries with more than 1200 registered Swiss citizens have the allocation of 1 seat (Delegate for OSA). There was a lady from Bolivia who mentioned that Bolivia has less than 1200 Swiss members. It was OK for her to be a Delegate. It also got mentioned that there must be a better Integration of the Young Swiss abroad to the structure of the OSA, to the Swiss Clubs in general and also to take part at Swiss Abroad Congress. The seat allocation for the Ausland Schweizer Rat (ASR) is as follows: ASR = 140 members which consist of 120 delegates from abroad and 20 delegates from Switzerland. The ASR can elect honorary members (Ehrenmitglieder) who can vote on meeting with the ASR.

It was also mentioned that the Red Cross is celebrating 150 years existence and that in some countries there is still a mix up between the Red Cross and the Swiss Cross, especially in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa – look at some ads for First Aid etc.

The afternoon session continued on the same lines and included participation from the Foreign Minister Didier Burkhalter. The Saturday session was part of the Assembly and followed by a scrumptious dinner at the Casino.

On Sunday we had a bus trip to Ballenberg on a beautiful sunny day. There were four buses full of Swiss Abroad delegates. We had a lovely lunch in a marquee especially erected for us. We returned back to Bern at 4pm and said goodbye to all our new friends. So we're looking forward to next year to see them all again in Basel.



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*We wish you all
a healthy and happy 2017*