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Melbourne CSA update and Embassy News

The Oceania Swiss Club Conference was held in Melbourne on Saturday 8th October 2016.

This is a bi-annual affair and due to the 100th anniversary of the Organisation for Swiss Abroad, it attracted some special attention. We were privileged to have some senior delegates from Switzerland representing the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Organisation of Swiss Abroad.

Considering that the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs has 90 Consular Divisions, 170 representatives, approximately 200 Honorary Consuls to service around the world, it was a privilege to have Juerg Burri, Ambassador, Director of the Consular Directorate of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs giving us an update on a wide range of very relevant topics. There are about 760,000 Swiss living Abroad. The highest number lives in France followed by Germany and USA. Australia is in 7th place with about 25,000 and New Zealand in 17th place with about 7000 Swiss citizens. Political participation in Australia and New Zealand is about 10% below the rest of the world. Obviously we appear to care less about happenings in the homeland, something to think about. Personally I believe we may have a higher percentage of long-term citizens in this part of the world and due to this we may integrate a bit deeper than others who are still living close to the homeland and have more opportunities to visit Switzerland.

Juerg encouraged us to use their services via internet or embassy contacts. If you wish to read more about this, please Google: The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in Switzerland.

The OSA was on the agenda next; another Swiss delegate, Remo Gysin, president of the Organisation of Swiss Abroad gave us a presentation on 100 years of OSA and its milestone achievements and future ambitions.

Some of the historic milestones:

- 1916 Recognition of ex-patriate Swiss community in London
- 1953 Swiss Citizen Act
- 1966 Constitutional article for Swiss Abroad
- 1992 Right to vote by mail
- 2000 Voluntary AHV for Swiss abroad living outside EU/EFTA
- 2015 Swiss Abroad Act
- 2016 100 years of OSA

If you wish to read about these achievements in detail, go to: www.SwissCommunity.org

Did you know that there is a Swiss path around the Urnersee?? I am sure you all do!! There are areas designated to each canton and the area set aside for the Swiss Abroad is apparently one of the few remaining monuments from the 700th Anniversary Celebrations in 1991. Check the website of www.auslandsschweizerplatz.ch

Remo went on to highlight that looking ahead to the future there are a significant number of tasks and projects to address and some of my favourites from the list are:

- Increasing contact among Swiss Associations and OSA
- Better integration of Young Swiss Abroad with the OSA
- Electronic voting.

These are just a few topics from a pretty extensive list.

Presentations continued and we had some stimulating discussions on the OSA's representatives' presentations. New Zealand is very well represented by Peter Ehrler. Peter might enlighten us in some of the specific topics.

Youth participation was discussed at length and Ryan Cooper, Oceania Representative of Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad, brought us up to date on what the young Swiss Citizens around the world are up to. The age group for this is 15 to 35 years of age. Their mission statement is:

RUN BY YOUTH FOR YOUTH

For us older folks it is not so natural but these young people seem to communicate via Facebook or other social media around the world. I had a look on Facebook and there is certainly quite a network of young Swiss people around the world communicating with each other.

Along with taking in all this information, we were also very well hosted by the Melbourne Swiss club. They have a lovely restaurant, open to the public too. Next time you are in Melbourne and longing for a traditional Swiss meal, look them up. A big thank you has to go to the organisers for running a great event, the people who travelled from far away for taking the time to attend, as well as all the local delegates. Most Swiss Clubs and Organisations from Australia were present. New Zealand was very well represented by Adrian Blaser, Herbert Staheli, Othmar Hebler, Peter Ehrler, myself and Juerg Bono from our Embassy. The next conference will be in Sydney in 2018.

Hans Vetsch, Swiss Society President

Älplerchilbi

**at the Residence of Switzerland
on 4 March 2017**

Those of you who were present at the celebration of 700 years of the Battle of Morgarten on 14 November 2015 at the Swiss Residence in Lower Hutt will surely have fond memories of it. It was the largest Swiss party that has ever taken place in New Zealand. Many of you have told the Embassy staff of your hope that it was not the last celebration of its kind. Swiss history offers no major anniversaries in 2017, but your voices have been heard and the party will take place. Hopefully, March will be less windy and cold than it was on Morgarten day. The theme will not be historical, but the Ambassador suggested one linked to our alpine traditions. When the cowherds and cheesemakers return from the alpine pastures with their cattle to be reunited with families and friends, the local communities of our mountain cantons celebrate with an Älplerchilbi. Music, songs, alphorn, sportive elements such as Schwingen (Swiss wrestling), stone throwing, good food and the "Chästeilet", with cheese that the cow owners produced on the mountains all summer long, are elements of this tradition. We will also celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Swiss Club of Wellington.

All Swiss Clubs of the Swiss Society have enthusiastically answered the call and will participate in the preparation of the first Älplerchilbi in New Zealand. As last time, there will be many attractions, even a few more, and young people will be introduced to their rights and responsibilities as Swiss citizens. Save the date of 4 March for a trip to Wellington and please let the Embassy know if you are able to contribute in any way. Many volunteers are once again needed.

