

# The theme of the coming assembly of the Swiss abroad

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# THE THEME OF THE COMING ASSEMBLY OF THE SWISS ABROAD

## THE SWISS ABROAD UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF TWO WORLDS

Every Swiss living abroad sooner or later arrives at a point where an attraction begins to show itself from both sides, the attachment to the old country and an ever growing affinity to the country of adoption. According to the magnetism of the latter, this will lead more and more to assimilation.

It has always been stressed that our compatriots have a great ability to adapt themselves to new surroundings, strange customs, languages and peoples. On the whole, they have few difficulties in finding their way in a new country and generally show understanding if not tolerance for the new environment. There are always some, and unfortunately many of the young Swiss going abroad temporarily, who do not try very hard to understand and analyse, but are most liberal with criticism and uncalled-for advice. The qualities which are traditionally Swiss, i.e. zest for work, sense of responsibility and a sense of initiative, are not as much in evidence these days of great affluence in Switzerland, although there, too, one must not generalise. But there is no doubt, they have been one of the reasons why Switzerland's emigration has been so successful on the whole. There is plenty of evidence to show how satisfying such a life under the influence of two worlds can be.

Nevertheless, there are many cases, not only in the second generation, in which this dual influence leads to conflict. If the influence of both countries is so strong that the *Auslandsschweizer* feels as if he had two homelands, it is a positive result. On the other hand, if the same dual influence makes the man or woman feel out of place and unhappy in both countries, that is a sad and negative consequence.

The reason why the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad wants to find out just how we feel, is in order to be able to help the Swiss living outside Switzerland according to the letter and the spirit of the special Article 45bis. in the Federal Constitution. On the basis of the answers they will get to their questionnaire, they hope to find out a lot more than they know at present. But in addition, the results will be of interest to the Swiss abroad themselves, to the authorities and the people in Switzerland. This will also be of special value with regard to similar problems the foreign population has in Switzerland.

Now what is this questionnaire? First of all, it contains the usual enquiries as to being employer or employee, how old, how many years abroad, whether the stay is limited or

not, and whether one visualises retirement or earlier return to Switzerland.

Then follow questions about language; is the Swiss mother tongue used by the person in question and his children. How far is there any effort to give the children training in Switzerland after schooling abroad, and by what means. Do the children react positively or negatively.

How far do we have a need to be informed about happenings in Switzerland. How do we judge information; should there be more and would this further our attachment to our homeland. Next comes the following paragraph: "Switzerland is small, and its linguistic and cultural diversity makes it difficult to advertise it abroad and to enlist foreign sympathy. Are the Swiss abroad therefore more susceptible to the influence of the country of adoption than other nationals?" This is obviously not a question which can be answered with a simple yes or no, and it wants thinking about.

Next follows a paragraph about the economic activities of the *Auslandsschweizer*. This has an extremely pertinent question: "Is our Swiss nationality a help or a hindrance in this field?"

The third section deals with "emotional life" with a number of questions dealing with tolerance or unwelcome pressure, with *Heimweh* and sympathy for Switzerland, with the impressions holidays at home make on the Swiss from abroad, and do we feel that our mother country really gives us sufficient support.

A group of questions next regarding other factors that may have an influence on assimilation or otherwise, conditions of work, housing, climate, food, leisure and daily commodities. This paragraph has a special addition for wives and children.

Then follows a most difficult question—"does assimilation in general begin early?" This seems so relative that a useful answer is impossible. It is much easier to answer the next questions on whether we look up on assimilation as a gain or as a loss, and whether we consider it an asset or disadvantage with regard to our personality.

Finally, we are asked whether our homeland could help us more in our assimilation problems, or the Embassies and Consulates, the Swiss societies and other Swiss organisations abroad, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and its Secretariat in Berne. What do we miss most in our country of adoption in comparison with Switzerland, or conversely, what do we appreciate most in our country of residence.

All told, there are some pretty

pertinent questions, and it is important that the answers are treated confidentially and that no names will be published. If that is not sufficient guarantee, we are even invited to send in the answers anonymously.

These questionnaires may be had from the Embassy and Consulates, and direct from the Secretariat in Berne, Alpenstrasse 26. The more that are returned by 31st July, the more valuable the whole enquiry.

Hand in hand with this survey, the Secretariat is asking all societies and organisations to make a return of membership (average age, proportion of German-, French- and Italian-speaking members, dual nationals, how many foreign wives (husbands), length of stay and if more employers or employees. Next, they want to know whether the society in question has certain aims, follows a cultural, political or other pattern, and which language is used at meetings.

Personally, I have my doubts as to a really useful result of the individual questionnaire on assimilation. Naturally, it will be interesting to know certain facts, but even where there is a good crop of answers in a single country, generalisations will be all too easy. The second questionnaire addressed to societies has more chance of leading to a comprehensive and satisfactory result, and all presidents should make themselves responsible for a return. But even with a slightly sceptical attitude to the individual survey, I believe we should answer it to the best of our ability. The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad are genuinely trying to help the Swiss away from home, and the more they learn about us, the better.

(MM)

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