

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1982)
Heft: 1795

Artikel: The 'Little Parliament' at work
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-688174>

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The 'Little Parliament' at work

ONE of the most important outcomes of the meeting of the Commission of Swiss Abroad in August was a resolution sent to the National Council.

It concerned the citizenship campaign – the possibility of passing on Swiss nationality to her children by a Swiss mother married to a foreigner and living abroad, thus eliminating the discrimination currently existing between Swiss women at home and those abroad.

The text of the resolution reads:

“The Nouvelle Société Helvétique’s commission of Swiss Abroad passed the following resolution at its meeting of August 20, 1982:

“The Auslandschweizerkommission has taken note with gratification that the Message to Parliament by the Federal Council of April 7, 1982 has taken into account the Parliamentary initiative handed in by the ASK’s president on March 23 1979, and visualises a revision of the citizenship regulations in the federal constitution in favour of the children of Swiss mothers and foreign fathers abroad.

“The ASK has also taken note favourably that the Council of States, as the first chamber to consider the message, followed its well-documented comments and has proposed to submit this problem separately.

“The Commission is now appealing to the National Council, the second chamber, to consider it, also to agree to this decision to treat the subject

separately for political reasons and for reasons of time.

“Finally, the Commission considers it important and urgent that the desired solution should already now be taken into consideration in the current revision of the citizenship laws.”

Since the Commission has consultative status, ie is included in the confederation’s Vernhemlungsverfahren, it is hoped that the resolution will carry the necessary weight, all the more so because a number of parliamentarians will support it.

The second discrimination against Swiss women abroad came up in the discussion of social insurance. It concerns the wives of Swiss working abroad for Swiss firms, institutions in the diplomatic and consular services, etc, who are insured compulsorily in Switzerland.

It has been established that such wives are not insured under the Swiss AHV/IV (AVS/AI) unless they have applied separately before the age of 50.

So far no definite decision has been taken, but various efforts by a number of interested parties and parliamentarians have been made, and it is hoped that reasonable solutions will be found to prevent this clear discrimination against Swiss women abroad.

The Swiss abroad and their voting rights were also under discussion. The concept of a postal vote in federal plebiscites has been put forward, but it was pointed out at the meeting that there were many difficulties attached to such a method, not

least the matter of adequate information and of delays in reaching Swiss living at the other end of the world. But the matter was being studied.

A new way of voting by post in the canton of Zurich was mentioned, and this pilot scheme will no doubt be observed closely by the federal authorities.

Next, delegates were informed of the extension of the federal decree regarding acquisition of land and properties by foreigners (Lex Furgler). The proposal to have this changed into a federal law with more responsibilities for the cantons was very controversial.

The problems regarding Swiss schools abroad, dealt with in detail at the Assembly in Lugano in 1980, have not diminished and much work is being done to secure the future of these valuable institutions which play such an important part in the presence of Switzerland abroad.

Tribute was paid to the hon. treasurer of the organisation, Dr David von Wyss, who retired after many years of devoted service. The president also congratulated Mrs Mariann Meier on her 20 years representing Great Britain South on the commission – for many years the only woman and, until a few years ago, the only woman as a full representative from abroad.

Next year’s assembly will meet in Zurich at the end of August, and the theme of the congress will be “Switzerland and the United Nations.” – **Mariann Meier.**