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# Communications of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad



## Commission of the Swiss Abroad

The traditional meeting of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad took place in Berne on Saturday, 12th March 1977. It was chaired by Dr. Louis Guisan. This year, it coincided with the first federal plebiscite at which Swiss resident abroad could take part.

From the many items on the agenda, which were dealt with, we should like to mention the following:

- The number of Swiss from abroad who took part in the federal plebiscite was still rather small. The information media will therefore have to give more detailed instructions as to the method of voting.
- Situation with regard to paying old-age pensions: In this, considerable delays have occurred for the Swiss abroad. The matter will be pursued further, for ways and

means must be found to secure prompt payment of pensions.

- Sickness insurance: There is now an insurance company which will accept people of all ages without admission payment. This may satisfy Swiss returning to Switzerland from abroad.

- All admission tickets for the «Fête des Vignerons» were sold out at the end of January. It is useless to write. There will be no sale of tickets at the door before individual performances.

## Lausanne 19th to 21st August 1977 55th Assembly of the Swiss Abroad



The 55th Assembly of the Swiss Abroad will take place in Lausanne, capital of the Canton of Vaud and economic and tourist centre on the shores of «Lac Léman».

The main theme of the Assembly will be «The Swiss Abroad and Technical Co-operation», which will enable us to show the divers activities in this field by our compatriots abroad.

The date of the Assembly was fixed in connection with the «Fête des Vignerons», whose last performance will take place on 14th August 1977. Thus visitors will have ample time to discover the beauties of the Vaudois wine districts, before they take part in our gathering. We expect our readers in large numbers in *Lausanne* where we shall have the pleasure of receiving and welcoming you.

Please fill in the application slip in block letters as soon as possible, so that we may send you detailed information regarding the 55th Assembly of the Swiss Abroad.

Our address: Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad of the NSH, Alpenstrasse 26, 3000 Berne 16, Switzerland.

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### 55th Assembly of the Swiss Abroad in Lausanne

Would you please let me have the programme and \_\_\_\_\_ copies of the application form.

Name and Christian name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Country: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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*The best-known and most popular Swiss gold coin is the twenty franc piece, affectionately termed the «Vreneli». Legal currency until the devaluation of the Swiss franc in 1936, nearly 60 million of these coins were minted between 1897 and 1949 (58 634 255 to be exact). Dr. Rosen presents here both the story and background of the Vreneli as well as of the remaining Swiss gold coins. A special part of the article is devoted to the creator of the motif on the coin and to his model.*

In 1883, Switzerland first issued a gold coin with a face value of twenty francs. It corresponded to similar coins of the Latin Monetary Union, an organization of which Switzerland had been a member since its inception in 1865. The value «20» is to the left of the shield and «FR» to the right, with the year of issue below. The Swiss emblem has given the coin its name as it has always been known by the French word «croix».

It was not long before people and government of Switzerland were united in wishing a new, more attractive coin and Fritz Ulysse Landry, a sculptor and medallionist from Neuchâtel, succeeded in grasping the opportunity presented. A competition was announced for designs of the new gold coin and a jury of experts unanimously awarded the first prize to Landry's design «Helvetia» on September 24, 1895.

### *The new coin*

What did Landry's coin look like? The obverse side bears the portrait of a lady; she is facing towards the left. Her long hair is fastened in plaits worn in the style of a head band; her dress is decorated with edelweiss. The youthful looking head is set against an alpine background, above which is the word HELVETIA. The Swiss cross is depicted on a raised shield, flanked by the value of «20 - FR», over a

## 60 million «Gold Vreneli»



background of a single oak branch. The year can be found under the shield, beginning with 1897. Size, weight and fineness are identical to the previous gold coin of 1883. When the new coin began to appear in 1897, the price of one kilo of gold (according to accounts submitted by the mint to the Federal Department of Finance and Customs) was Sfr. 3454.56. The production of a twenty franc coin cost altogether 20 francs 6½ centimes, which meant that for each new coin leaving the mint the Confederation had to pay an additional 6½ centimes. Today the market price of a kilo of gold is approximately Sfr. 10 000.

The coin was issued in 1897 in a mintage of 400 000. Twenty-nine of these were struck from light-toned gold mined in Gondo, Canton Valais. Up to and including 1916, a total of 7.63 m twenty franc gold pieces were produced – an average of 381 500 a year. In mid-June 1976, the price of such a coin was around Sfr. 110, apart from the years 1904 and 1905, which are now valued at Sfr. 400, and 1906, which is worth approx. Sfr. 300. Production was taken up again in 1922 when 2 783 678 coins were minted. From this point on, production figures become

more irregular. In 1923 and 1924 no coins were minted, whereas 400 000 appeared in 1925. In the following year on the other hand, only 50 000 were put on the market. This is by far the smallest mintage of any year and coins of this date correspondingly fetch a price of Sfr. 440. The record high level of production was attained in 1927 with five million coins. In addition, a sizeable amount was also produced in 1930 (3.37 m). This phase of production was eventually closed in 1935, when 175 000 coins were produced. Then, the severe economic crisis of 1936 necessitated the devaluation of the Swiss franc. This meant that the value of the 20 franc gold piece suddenly increased to Sfr. 28.50, which was also the case twenty years later. The coin was accordingly of little use as an instrument of payment and henceforth gold coins were not produced for a long period.

Only after the Second World War was minting resumed, and this, in quantities larger than ever before. In the five years between 1945 and 1949 no fewer than 39.2 m twenty franc gold coins were struck, i.e. twice as many as the total produced between 1897 and 1935. Of these 39.2 m, somewhat more than 20 m were given in the fictive date 1935, which was signified by the printing of an «L» before the date. In 1947, 8.7 m coins appeared, in 1948 there were ½ m and finally in 1949 exactly 10 m twenty franc gold coins were produced. These pieces of gold, although officially reminted in a form identical to that of the earlier gold coins, were essentially a kind of old medal.

### *10 and 100 franc gold coins*

After the striking success of the twenty franc gold coin, demand became evident for a smaller version of the coin with a face value of 10 francs. Landry's design was again chosen, though reduced to the appropriate size. This was in



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1910-11. The diameter of the new coin was 19 mm; it weighed 3.26 g and contained 2.9034 g of fine gold. The first year of minting was 1911, when 100 000 coins were struck and by 1916 some 1 630 000 coins had been minted. Following an interruption caused, as with the twenty franc pieces, by the war, production was resumed in 1922 with 1 020 000 coins. Then it ceased once and for all. Between 1911 and 1922, a total of 2.65 m ten franc pieces had been struck; in other words, one twentieth of the total number of twenty franc pieces. The collector's price of the smaller coin is correspondingly high. At Sfr. 180, it is almost twice as much as the larger coin. The first, rarer year of 1911 fetches as much as Sfr. 750.

## The artist and his model

Who was Landry, and who served as his model for the coin? The sculptor and medallionist Fritz Ulysse Landry was born in Le Locle on September 26, 1842. He was a pupil of the famous Geneva painter Barthélemy Menn and he also worked with the sculptor and

Françoise Kramer-Egli (1859-1946) the model for «Vreneli». (Photo CS)



## 20 franc gold coin (Vreneli): dates of issue and mintages\*

*Proof edition (Landry's model with curls on forehead)*

1897 12

*Minting of final version (without curls on forehead)*

1897	400 000 <sup>1</sup>	1913	700 000
1898	400 000	1914	700 000
1899	300 000	1915	750 000
1900	400 000	1916	300 000
1901	500 000	1922	2 783 678
1902	600 000	1925	400 000
1903	200 000	1926	50 000
1904	100 000	1927	5 015 000
1905	100 000	1930	3 371 764
1906	100 000	1935	175 000
1907	150 000	1935 L	20 008 813 <sup>2</sup>
1908	355 000	1947	9 200 000 <sup>3</sup>
1909	400 000	1949	10 000 000 <sup>3</sup>
1910	375 000		
1911	350 000		
1912	450 000	Total	58 634 255

\* Source: Eidgenössische Münzstätte, Berne.

<sup>1</sup> Including 29 coins from gold mined in Gondo, Canton Valais.

<sup>2</sup> Minted in 1946/47: mint mark «LB» and fictive date of issue.

<sup>3</sup> Circumscription: AD LEGEM ANNI MCMXXXI.

medallionist Antoine Bovy. Remaining a bachelor the whole of his life, he lived with his sister in Neuchâtel until his death at the age of 85. The family Kramer-Egly were their neighbours.

His model, Madame Kramer, née Françoise Egli, was born in Neuchâtel on December 10, 1859 and died on November 11, 1946 at the ripe old age of 87.

Renowned as one of the most beautiful women in Neuchâtel, Madame Kramer often modelled for Frith Landry, who was a close friend of the lady and her husband. Thus, when Landry took part in the competition for the new Swiss gold coin, she became the model for this epitome of Swiss womanhood, and justifiably so too, judging by her origin and appearance.

*Vreneli came, was seen and conquered*

Vrenely? At first the coin did not go

by this name. The origin of this typically affectionate name – would the coin have ever become so popular without it? – must remain a mystery. Even before the Second World War, the name was not familiar and the coins were referred to as 10 franc and 20 franc pièces. Then this appealing name was «coined», though it is not known by whom. It appeared in print for the first time as late as 1943, proved to be a permanence, and has been the official designation for over 25 years. «Vreneli» is in fact the name of one of the most attractive gold coins of the contemporary period.

*Dr. Joseph Rosen, Basle*

## Book Reviews

### «L'assistance des pauvres au Moyen-Age dans le Pays de Vaud»

In the 'twenties', Alice Briod, student of law at the University of Lausanne, published an essay on the care of the poor in the Middle Ages. Her studies covered the brutal yet delightful history of the position of the poor in the Canton of Vaud a few centuries ago. The situation, though, was much the same all over Europe.

Alice Briod became an active collaborator of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique for 32 years, and this afforded her many opportunities to concern herself with poverty inside and outside Switzerland.

*Contents: 120 pages. French text. New edition of original wording. Bound in blue and black cover. Price Fr. 12.-. Obtainable from Editions d'en Bas, case postale 304, 1000 Lausanne 17, Switzerland, or at bookshops.*

### «La Maison suisse»

Paul Leonhard Ganz, art historian in Basle, describes the history of Swiss houses, from lake dwellings to modern buildings, from farm houses to the richest patrician mansions.

His book shows the charm and diversity of Helvetic architecture, from the Jura right into the Alps, from the Lake of Geneva to the Grisons.

*Contents: 220 pages. 140 illustrations, of which 98 in colour. French text. Format 24x28 cm. Bound in linen with protective jacket in four colours. Price SFr. 48.-. To be had from Editions 24 Heures, avenue de la Gare 39, 1001 Lausanne, Switzerland, and at bookshops.*

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## Swiss citizenship

### Notice to Swiss women married to foreigners:

*Result of insertion published in this periodical in December 1976, regarding the nationality of children of couples as described above:*

A proper flood of letters has been sent to us, altogether over 1300. We should like to take this opportunity and thank all those who took the trouble to let us know their interest in this problem. You will surely understand that it is impossible for us to answer all the letters in writing, especially since every case presented to us shows individual aspects.

We should like to stress that Swiss citizenship is legally not possible for children of Swiss women married to foreigners. We are far removed from being able to offer such a possibility. The study of the problem begun after receiving your letters is far from concluded, and all we can say now is that perhaps your wish will one day become a reality.

#### Legal position today

Acquisition and loss of Swiss citizenship are defined in the federal law of 29th September 1952. Essentially this decrees the following:

- Swiss citizenship is given at birth to a child born in wedlock, whose father is a Swiss citizen, and the illegitimate child whose mother is a Swiss citizen. (Art. 1)
- The legitimate child of a foreign father and a Swiss mother is given at birth cantonal and communal citizenship and thus Swiss citizenship, provided the child *cannot* have at birth any other nationality. (Art. 5, 1)
- Application for citizenship can be made by a foreigner only if he has lived in Switzerland for a total of *twelve years*, of which three during the five years prior to making the application. (Art. 15, 1)
- For the period of twelve years, the time which the applicant lived in Switzerland between his completed 10th and 20th year of age, counts double. (Art. 15, 2)
- The re-naturalization of a woman whose marriage has ceased to exist, whose husband has died, whose marriage has been annulled or dissolved, may include children under age, provided they live in Switzerland (Art. 20), or these children may regain Swiss citizenship more easily, if the mother has retained her Swiss citizenship on marriage (Art. 28a) provided the conditions under Art. 20 are fulfilled.
- Children of a Swiss woman (Swiss at birth) who have lived in Switzerland for at least ten years, may become naturalised very easily if they live in Switzerland and make the application before completing their 22nd year of age.

Thus one can see that *residence in Switzerland* is absolutely essential. This law dating from 1952, which is at present being revised, has already received a considerable modification inasmuch as, from 1st January 1978, children of Swiss mothers who were Swiss at birth and foreign fathers will be given Swiss nationality *provided the parents are living in Switzerland at the time of birth*. A retrospective clause has been provided for, but the children must have fulfilled the conditions at birth and must not yet have reached the age of 22 on 1st January 1978.

#### Our campaign has the following aim:

To try and get Swiss citizenship also for children of Swiss mothers and foreign fathers, even if they are born and resident abroad.

Shall we be successful? That is very difficult to say, above all with regard to what success will look like. The controversial point at issue will be whether the children in question will become dual nationals or whether they will have to opt for one or the other nationality on coming of age. Your letters on this problem are a great help to us, and we repeat our thanks.

The committee has started work, and you will be informed of its progress in this periodical. But we warn you, the task will be a long one, for the time it takes for a law to become operative is between eight and ten years.

Our Address: Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, 3000 Berne 16, Switzerland

Campaign «Swiss Citizenship»  
The Committee



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## Swiss Disaster Relief Abroad

The idea of Swiss disaster relief abroad owes its existence to motions by various Swiss parliamentarians. These led, in 1970, to the creation of a Central Office for Disaster Relief in Switzerland and, in 1972, to the appointment by the Federal Council of a Delegate for Disaster Relief Abroad. In conformity with the intentions announced by the Federal Council in its report of 11th August 1971, this Delegate was given the task of setting up a Swiss volunteer corps, with the necessary personnel and materials, of organizing it and maintaining it in readiness for use in the event of natural disaster or for humanitarian campaigns after armed conflicts.

### *Swiss volunteer corps*

In establishing a volunteer relief corps, Switzerland was entering a new field. Foreign experiments in this sphere, several examples of which were studied in detail, were only of limited application as models, since the countries concerned generally use military units, which have the advantage that they can be very rapidly mobilized. Switzerland, on the other hand, decided to form a volunteer corps, not only because it would suit the particular conditions of our country, but also because it would be better able to cope with the realities of action in the field. Thus, the volunteers will not as a rule have to wear uniform, and a reserve of personnel and materials can be maintained in a relatively flexible form.

Established in 1973, the Swiss corps today numbers about 1000 volunteers, selected from among more than 4000 applicants. They are specialists, covering the following fields: medicine (doctors, nurses etc.), structural engineering (engineers, architects, constructors, building supervisors, brick-

layers, carpenters etc.), supply (storekeepers, cooks, bookkeepers etc.), communications (radio operators, fitters, technicians etc.) and transport (drivers, mechanics etc.).

They are recruited on the basis of specific criteria: professional competence, physical and mental stamina, sense of responsibility, adaptability, knowledge of languages, team spirit, experience of foreign countries etc. They must also undergo a thorough medical examination and a full programme of vaccination, then sign a general employment agreement, countersigned by the employer. This contract lays down, in particular, the amount of notice the volunteer needs to make himself available for a relief mission, the duration of the mission (from a few days to three months or more) and the salary (paid by the Confederation when the employer cannot pay).

The volunteers also receive appropriate practical and theoretical training. Special courses are regularly organized for them.

A stock of material (individual equipment, corps material, tools, machines etc.) and means of transport, communication and administration have been assembled and are permanently available.

A card index system, which will shortly be supplemented by a planning chart, enables the necessary specialists to be located quickly. In this way it is possible to choose from a reserve of men and women of all ages and occupations, without regard to party or creed, the staff needed to carry out relief operations of all kinds and varying scales. Here, briefly, are some examples:

### *Operation Sahel*

This was carried out in the Lake Chad basin, from October 1974 to February 1975, in response to UN

Secretary-General Waldheim's appeal on behalf of this region, which was severely affected by drought. The operation made use of about a hundred volunteers of the Swiss Disaster Relief Corps and provided an opportunity to test the functioning of this new organization and to learn from its first practical experience. In spite of the difficulties of that first operation, which took place in four different countries and also in Gewani (Ethiopia), the Corps, helped by several hundred local workers, achieved virtually all the objectives it had set itself: curative and preventive medical care, vaccination of several thousand nomads, distribution of 354 tons of relief material, repair work in 12 hospitals and dispensaries, construction of three hospital establishments, of water reservoirs, of five large depots for agricultural enterprises in which the FAO was carrying out pilot development schemes, and of four other buildings for social purposes, repair of landing strips, digging of wells, installation of a ferry and of pumping stations etc. The cost of this operation was about five million Swiss francs.

### *Turkey*

Following the Lice earthquake, in September 1975, which claimed more than 2000 victims, the Turkish Government accepted an offer of help by the Swiss Disaster Relief Corps. The operation was carried out in two phases: in October a group of about 15 volunteers, comprising mainly building specialists, constructed in less than six weeks, with the help of prefabricated parts transported from Switzerland by road, 50 houses at Yünlüce, a mountain peasants' village in eastern Anatolia. Then, for three months in the summer of 1976, a new team of volunteers added an infrastructure and social buildings; these included school premises, a mosque, a dispensary, a water supply and 150 cattle-sheds

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spread over Yünlüce and the surrounding villages. These buildings, which cost three million francs, were handed over officially to the Turkish authorities on 18th November 1976.

A few days later a new earthquake ravaged the eastern part of the country. Preliminary aid, to a value of 485 000 francs, was immediately sent by air. Then, at the request of the Turkish authorities, a group of volunteers transported and erected, between 12th December 1976 and 5th January 1977, two large prefabricated multi-purpose buildings for use as dispensaries, dormitories, store-rooms etc. This work will be completed by the addition of further buildings in the spring of 1977.

## *Guatemala*

Nearly 12 million francs was collected in Switzerland following the earthquake of 4th February 1976 which caused the death of 24 000 people and destroyed 250 000 houses. After immediate aid had been ensured, four charitable organizations, including the Swiss Red Cross, together with Swiss Disaster Relief decided to carry out a joint aid programme, comprising the rebuilding of 2500 houses, and to devote about half the above sum to the reconstruction of Santiago Sacatepéquez, a community of about 6000 people situated 40 kilometres from Guatemala City which had been almost completely destroyed. Teams of volunteers have been working in relays since July 1976, with the object of rebuilding, in a simple but permanent manner, 1000 houses and several social buildings. The intention is to respect the traditional Guatemalan style of building while introducing anti-earthquake improvements.

## *Italy*

Immediately after the report of the earthquake which practically destroyed Frioul, Swiss Disaster Relief

sent by air and road medicaments, vaccines and tents to a value of half a million francs. It also engaged two military helicopters, which carried out, between 17th and 29th May, 21 operations with 200 landings in the disaster area for the medical service of Udine province. Finally, on the basis of agreements concluded with the local authorities, the Swiss Disaster Relief Corps rebuilt, between August and December 1976, part of the mountain village of Subit and, with financial help from the Swiss Red Cross, that of Borgo Cancellier. They were able to build 20 two-storey concrete earthquake-resistant houses comprising safe, permanent flats for 40 families. This work, which had cost 2.6 million francs by the end of 1976, will be continued in the spring of 1977. In September 1976 the volunteer corps also organized the transport and distribution of 62 tons of building machines and other building equipment – concrete mixers, cranes etc. – made available to Frioul by numerous members of the Swiss Building Contractors' Association.

Then, in response to an appeal from the Italian authorities following new and severe earth tremors in September 1976, operation «huts» was launched. This consisted of buying 60 huts in Switzerland, transporting them to the disaster zone of Attimis and erecting them as accommodation for 600 people. All for one million Swiss francs. Finally, parallel to this operation, the volunteer corps carried out the «caravan campaign». The appeal to the Swiss people was successful in that 120 caravans – 85% of which were permanent gifts – were sent to Frioul, where they are occupied by about 400 people.

## *Other operations*

Since the creation of the Swiss Disaster Relief Corps about 50 volunteers have carried out technical or organizational missions

abroad on behalf of other organizations, notably the FAO (six railway experts in Senegal and Mali), the ICRC (various specialists and doctors in Vietnam, the Middle East and Angola and six Relief Delegates in Lebanon), the League of Red Cross Societies (an administrator in Niger), the High Commission for Refugees (an architect in Guinea-Bissau). Eighteen radio operators also worked in the Indian sub-continent from 29th September 1973 to 22nd March 1976. As yet the Swiss Disaster Relief Corps has taken no part in the first phase after a disaster, when immediate life-saving measures are required, but only in the second and third phases, when the vital task is to overcome the crisis by restoring the essentials of life in the disaster area and then, by reconstruction, to re-establish normal conditions.

However, the Federal Council's Delegate for Disaster Relief Abroad is studying the possibility of creating small units (especially surgical and communications) which could go into action immediately. At the same time he is endeavouring to conclude agreements – such as already exist with Greece, Turkey and Pakistan – with countries regularly affected by natural disasters, so as to settle the legal and administrative conditions enabling the Corps to be deployed as quickly as possible.

Finally, the Federal Council's Delegate is also trying to develop even closer relations with the international organizations, particularly with UNDRO (Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator).

Convinced that solidarity remains one of the basic essentials of Swiss foreign policy, the Delegate hopes to make the Swiss volunteer corps a flexible, quick and effective instrument, so that the humanitarian dimension of our foreign aid, particularly to the Third World, may be extended still further.