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The Swiss Abroad and their Institutions

The Nouvelle Société Helvétique's Organization of the Swiss Abroad

The Nouvelle Société Helvétique's Organization of the Swiss Abroad was founded in 1916. A few responsible persons realized that the NSH had a task to perform towards the Swiss communities abroad. At that time, these were particularly affected by the division which separated the German-speaking Swiss from their French-speaking compatriots due to the war. At that period, 400 000 Swiss lived abroad – a record number – and one has to admit that up to that time, their mother country had taken pretty little notice of its emigrants.

The NSH started from the basic idea that the Swiss living in other countries, too, should be kept abreast of affairs in their homeland. The second step was organizing assistance for Swiss abroad who were in need. It was soon realized that somebody in Switzerland had to be around who could look after the interests in Switzerland of the Swiss living abroad. Thus the Commission of the Swiss Abroad was created, and right from the beginning, well-known personalities lent their services to this body. The Commission of the Swiss Abroad consists of 100 members today, 76 delegated by the Swiss communities abroad, whilst 24 members from inside Switzerland represent political, cultural and economic spheres. The Commission is often called «Parliament of the Swiss Abroad». Naturally, the Commission also needed an office as a connecting link and executive organ. Towards

this end, the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad was established in 1919. It proved, right from the beginning, a most necessary and effective instrument. The need of such a central office was shown for the first time in a concrete way when the returning emigrants from revolutionary Russia had to be looked after.



Seat of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad

No fewer than 600 societies and institutions of Swiss living outside Switzerland belong to the Organization of the Swiss Abroad. The OSA is consulted by the Swiss Confederation whenever questions and problems concerning Swiss Abroad are considered. Today, the Organization may look back with satisfaction on all that

has been achieved. It has played a considerable part in the improvement of the status of Swiss abroad and in making their ties with the homeland closer. The periodical «echo» published monthly plays a special part in this. In addition, there is the quarterly information magazine «Review» which is published in co-operation with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, sent free of charge to all registered Swiss abroad. Another important part in giving quick information is played by the shortwave services of «Swiss Radio International». All these means of information also impart news of the various activities of the Secretariat, such as lecture service, film service, newspaper service, book and reading services, youth camps and obviously also on the Assemblies of the Swiss Abroad.

The number of Swiss living abroad has been increasing again during the past two decades and now stands at about 340 000. But there has been a marked change in the composition of Swiss communities abroad. In former times, one emigrated intending to remain abroad for decades or even for the whole of one's life. The responsibility for this decision rested with oneself alone. Today one goes abroad for a specific time on the whole, and generally not of one's own will, but by order of an employer. Naturally, this has had its effect on the life of Swiss communities abroad. But the problems have not decreased by

any means; on the contrary, increasing bureaucracy creates ever new problems, and the Swiss abroad have to face more and

more regulations and depend all the more on help from the Organization of the Swiss Abroad and its Secretariat.

**If you need advice,
please apply to the
NSH Secretariat of the
Swiss Abroad,
Alpenstrasse 26,
3000 Berne 16,
Switzerland.**

The Assemblies of the Swiss Abroad

Every year towards the end of August, Swiss from abroad traditionally meet in a different place in Switzerland in order to discuss with the federal authorities and administration their own problems as well as those that face Switzerland.

These get-togethers called Assemblies of the Swiss Abroad focus on a new central topic each time and represent the highlight of the work carried out by the Organization of the Swiss Abroad and its Secretariat. Thanks to personal contacts which make it possible to throw light on special concerns of our compatriots, the possibility is created to sensitize the people at home by means of

the mass media which always give valuable assistance.

In 1979, the 57th Assembly took place at Porrentruy in the recently created new Canton Jura. The first such meeting took place in Basle in 1919 at the time of the Swiss Industries Fair. Right through the twenties, the congress remained faithful to that first venue. After only eight years, it was decided to hold the assembly in a different place in Switzerland every year. It is a not unimportant fact that in the 61 years on which the Secretariat may look back, only three times was there no congress, and that was during the world economic crisis.

Usually no fewer than 500 Swiss from abroad are expected to take part in the congress during which they can express their opinions, speak their minds and take part in the plenary sessions. The latter achieve special importance by the presence of a representative of the Federal Council as well as of an official delegation of the Swiss Parliament.

Because of the steadily increasing importance of these get-togethers, it is recommended that every Swiss abroad should take part.

**Do attend the Assembly
of the Swiss Abroad**

Further Private Organizations in the Service of the Swiss Abroad

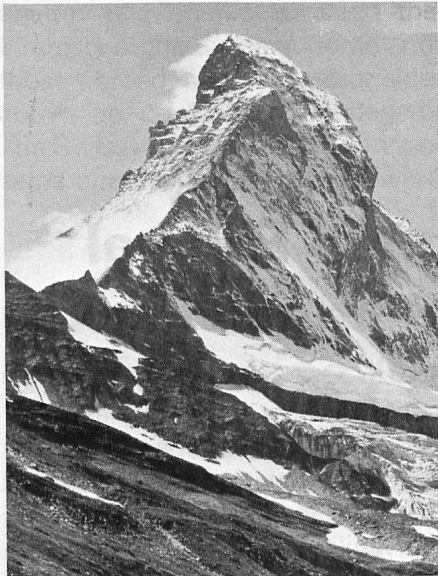
Apart from the Nouvelle Société Helvétique's Organization of the Swiss Abroad and its Secretariat in Berne, there are several other private or semi-official institutions whose activities are fully or partly in favour of Swiss abroad.

The **Foundation Swiss Aid** (Stiftung Schweizerhilfe) was founded in 1917 and had as its original aim the care of Swiss children from war-ravaged and crisis-shaken countries. With voluntary workers, it collects

funds every year in order to bring the homeland nearer to Swiss children abroad: through holidays, vocational training and in cases of sickness also medical treatment in Switzerland. On principle, all Swiss children living abroad may profit of this service. Where the parents are in a position to pay the cost of a stay in Switzerland, they are asked to do so; where they can pay only part of the cost, the Foundation will provide the rest; and where the means are lacking completely, Swiss Aid will take on the whole costs.

The Foundation Swiss Aid not only produces the funds, but it also looks after the children from abroad, together with Pro Juventute, and endeavours to bring the children closer to their homeland.

The **Educational Service for Young Swiss from Abroad** (Ausbildungswerk für junge Auslandschweizer AJAS) advises young compatriots from abroad and their parents on questions of schooling and vocational training in Switzerland. It helps them to



The Matterhorn

prepare stays in Switzerland for schooling, vocational training and studies and, where necessary, to arrange scholarships and loans in order to secure the necessary finances.

The Educational Service gets its financial means for its work from the three supporting organizations (Foundation Swiss Aid, Pro Juventute and Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad), as well as by a subsidy from the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

The **Auxiliary Committee for Swiss Schools Abroad** is formed by the Foundation Swiss Aid and the NSH's Organization of the Swiss Abroad. This committee advises the 19 Swiss schools abroad (see chapter «The Swiss Schools Abroad»), its School Committee and the teaching staff and headmasters of the schools. In particular, it provides materials and teaching aids, organizes courses for leaders and teachers, as well as gives help in arranging holiday camps.

The **Schnyder von Wartensee Foundation** offers aid as far as

possible to Swiss abroad who have suffered as a result of natural catastrophes.

The **Heinrich Huber Foundation for Swiss Overseas** provides financial support and scholarships abroad to Swiss who, without fault of their own, suffer want in far-off countries.

A further Foundation is the **Kiefer-Hablitzel Stiftung** which puts part of its income at the disposal of Swiss in commercial pursuits overseas, who, without fault of their own, lose the basis of their livelihood and consequently have had to return to Switzerland.

The **Pro Juventute** takes care of Swiss children from abroad who stay in our country with the assistance of the above-mentioned Foundation Swiss Aid.

The **Swiss Evangelical Union of Churches** (Schweizerischer Evangelischer Kirchenbund) as well as the **Conference of Swiss Bishops** keep up an office each to look after the religious needs of Swiss abroad, to help with the choice of Ministers and Pastors, Youth Workers, etc.

The **Swiss Tropical Institute** in Basle, too, is of interest to Swiss abroad. Emigrants may use its information and documentation service. The clinic connected with it enables treatment of repatriated Swiss who suffer from tropical diseases. This is not free of charge.

The **Foundation Pro Helvetia** should also be mentioned; its cultural events organized abroad are of advantage to Swiss in foreign lands.

Some economic organizations, the **Swiss Office for the Development of Trade**, the **Union of Swiss Chambers of Commerce Abroad** and the **Swiss National Tourist Office** may render valuable service to Swiss abroad; they are connected to them through their agencies or Chambers of Commerce abroad.

Finally mention should be made of some important auxiliary organizations in Switzerland which will never fail in advising Swiss abroad; among them are Pro Infirmitas, Pro Senectute, the Swiss Association for the Blind and Visually Handicapped, and the Society for Rheumatic Diseases.

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