

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 9 (1982)
Heft: 2

Artikel: Meeting of the commission of the Swiss Abroad
Autor: Kistler, Jörg
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907609>

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Meeting of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad

As every year, the delegates to the Commission of Swiss resident abroad met at the first week-end in March for their spring session. Considering that the members do their work in an honorary capacity, the surprisingly large attendance deserves praise. With great pleasure, the Chairman, Dr. Alfred Weber, welcomed the President of the National Council, Mrs Hedi Lang, National Councillor Claude Bonnard and Councillor of States Odilio Guntern, all of whom were newly elected to the Commission last year.

The problems of the Swiss schools abroad again caused much discussion. Last year's decision to withdraw the federal subsidy from the schools in Genoa, Florence and Naples at the end of the scholastic year 1982/83 and 1983/84 respectively caused great alarm. And the smaller schools, now face increasing difficulties through the demand for greater local support from Swiss communities and for an increase in the number of Swiss children in kindergardens and primary schools from 6 to 9 per subsidised teacher. If the prescribed rate is not reached, the missing amount will be deducted from the federal subsidy by way of punishment as it were for not getting more support from the local Swiss colonies. The second demand might mean that some of the schools cannot employ the same number of teachers any more. The Organization of Swiss Abroad will keep up the dialogue with the competent bodies in order to try and find ways and means to lessen the counterproductive results of the new regulations.

Apart from the schools, the grievous subject of the AHV/AVS (old age and disability insurance) was subject for discussion. As is



Hedi Lang,
President of the
Swiss National
Council,
and member
of the Commis-
sion
of the Swiss
Abroad
(Photo
Keystone)

now known, the Federal Insurance Tribunal in Lucerne ruled last year that wives of Swiss working abroad for Swiss concerns and organizations, and who are compulsorily insured under the AHV in Switzerland, are not insured unless they applied separately. This has specially grave consequences in the case of women who became invalids during their stay abroad, for abroad invalidity benefits are payable only to contributors. It is specially appalling that not only are new claims by such women refused, but already paid-out benefits are demanded back. In a particularly cruel case, the AHV office, based on the new interpretation of the AHV law, benefits to the amount of 38000 Francs paid out to the invalid woman between 1976 and 1980, have been demanded back. There are only few cases, and all concerning wives of Swiss abroad who are compulsorily insured in Switzerland. It does not apply to members of the voluntary AHV insurance for Swiss abroad. Nevertheless, the matter is of great importance. Final decisions are still awaited. The Secretariat of Swiss Abroad will keep compatriots outside Switzerland informed of developments.

Joerg Kistler