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The 72nd Congress of the Swiss Abroad at Lenzerheide/Valbella

The significance of the “First Switzerland”

About 500 Swiss Abroad from 38 countries took part in the discussions about the role of the Fifth Switzerland for the Swiss economy at this year's Congress.

“I am thinking not so much in terms of the Fifth Switzerland as of the First – that of commitment and courage”. This was how Federal Councillor Jean-Pascal Delamuraz began his address to the congress. The Economics Minister declared his conviction that the Swiss Abroad make a substantial contribution to Switzerland's prosperity, and not only in the economic field.

To define this contribution more comprehensively was the objective set by the organisers of this year's congress. In an increasingly globalised economy, Swiss firms operating on the international scene no longer employ Swiss managers only. But Switzerland's presence abroad nevertheless continues to play an important role. Swiss companies depend on the foreign experi-

ence of their staff, and Swiss Abroad occupying prominent positions promote the image of their country and its products.

In his summing up, National Councillor Georg Stucky, vice-president of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), expressed his satisfaction about these elements. He also underlined the importance of a healthy network of relationships and of information for Switzerland's presence abroad. He called on potential emigrants to face up to the challenges of the global economy and ended by urging politicians to support all Swiss activities in foreign countries, taking the financing of Swiss schools abroad as a pertinent example.

OSA President Jean-Jacques Cevey closed the congress by appealing to the Fifth Switzerland to be increasingly aware of their role in promoting the image of their country. The banquet on the Saturday and the œcumenical service followed by

Gerhart Schürch is dead

Former National Councillor Gerhart Schürch died at the end of August aged 84. Schürch was director of the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad from 1934 to 1941 and president of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad from 1959 to 1967.

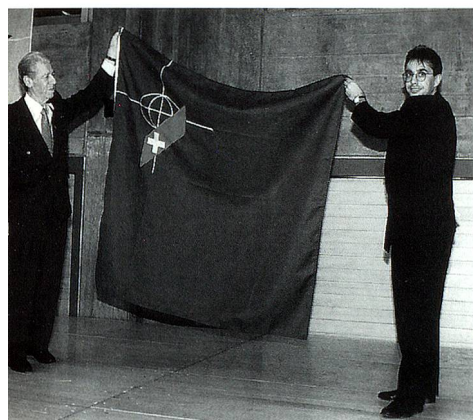
the excursion on Sunday brought this extremely successful congress to a very pleasant end.

Next year's congress will be held on August 25–27 in Berne, and its main subject will be the imminent federal elections.

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Jean-Jacques Cevey, president of the OSA (left), hands the mayor of Lenzerheide/Valbella, Benno Burtcher, the flag of the Fifth Switzerland. (Photo: SSA)

The Council for the Swiss Abroad (CSA) meets

Two main subjects: Swiss schools and SRI

At its autumn session, the CSA spent much of its time discussing the financing of Swiss schools abroad and Swiss Radio International (SRI).

The 16 official Swiss schools abroad receive financial aid from the federal government because Swiss children attend them. About one-third of the pupils at such schools

are of Swiss nationality. The federal subsidy covers about 40% of expenses and the rest comes from school fees and donations.

In the context of today's federal austerity measures, there is a danger that the subsidy to the schools will be reduced or limited to those outside Europe. The CSA passed a resolution pleading against such measures, since the schools are “an indispensable cornerstone of

Switzerland's presence in the world” and are valuable “meeting centres in host countries”.

In a second resolution, the CSA regretted the cut in the federal subsidy to SRI. This will mean that some parts of

the world will no longer be able to receive broadcasts from Switzerland, which does not chime with the requirement to provide more information about political developments here.

With OSA President Jean-Jacques Cevey in the chair, the council then debated the optional pension scheme, the law preventing non-residents from purchasing land and withholding tax. There was also a lengthy discussion on relations with the political parties. Finally, the council recognised four new Swiss associations: Verona-Vicenza, Maremma and Romagna (all in Italy) and Leipzig (Germany).

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Ski camps

The two ski and snowboard camps run by the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad take place from December 27, 1994, to January 5, 1995, at Splügen/Grisons and from April 14 to 23 at Grimentz/Valais. Details and registration: SSA – Youth Service, Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3000 Berne 16