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77th Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lausanne

Wide-ranging debate on the question of Europe

This year's congress held by of the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad (OSA) boasted a record attendance of 800 participants from 41 different countries. In his address on foreign policy Federal Councillor Joseph Deiss stressed the need for Switzerland to strengthen its presence in Europe as well as in the United Nations, in order to participate in the decision-making process.

This year's Congress of the Swiss Abroad was dominated by the bilateral agreement between Switzerland and the European Union (EU). In his address Ambassador Bruno Spinner discussed the results of the various

sonate plea for Switzerland's integration in the EU. Drawing on the annals of history, the Vice President of the OSA demonstrated that something akin to a European identity was already emerging at the time of Char-

full-member role in the new order of the old continent, added Eggly with conviction.

National Economist Kurt Schiltknecht represented the forces ranged against the EU and gave clear reasons for his scepticism on any further rapprochement of Switzerland with the EU. In Schiltknecht's view the pressure to harmonise legislation and labour market regulations are the main stumbling blocks along the road to Brussels.

part in a stimulating and heated podium discussion. Zurich National Councillor Ulrich Schlüer of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) took the Eurosceptic's view, plainly stating his belief that the seven dossiers were poor agreements. By contrast National Councillor Christiane Langenberger of the Liberal Democratic Party (FDP) and National Councillor Jean-Philippe Maitre of the Christian Democratic Party (CVP) voiced satisfaction with the bilateral agreements and regarded them as a good springboard for further moves towards integration.



(Photo: Keystone)

Visually and otherwise, the visit to the Fêtes des Vignerons was a unique experience.

agreements and made no bones about his satisfaction at the value of the agreement. What has been achieved is not half bad, according to the head of the Integration Office in Berne. In particular, he believed the agreements were cost-effective for the public sector: "These agreements are neither a step towards EU adhesion, nor towards non-adhesion. They are equally acceptable to opponents and supporters of adhesion as well as for the undecided," said Spinner.

Commitment to ongoing integration

National Councillor Jacques-Simon Eggly made a pas-

lemagne's empire. By dint of its strategic geographical position at the heart of Europe alone, Switzerland is predestined to play a

Broad spectrum of opinion

Visitors to the plenary session were then invited to take

Autumn session of the Council for the Swiss Abroad

The Council for the Swiss Abroad (CSA) supports the seven bilateral agreements. In its resolution the OSA's highest organ and acknowledged voice of the Fifth Switzerland unanimously voted in favour of ratification by the federal assembly. At the same time it declared that Switzerland would soon be forced to open discussion on the question of institutional participation in the new Europe.

By contrast, the upcoming revision of the voluntary AHV/IV is continuing to give Swiss Abroad cause for concern. National Councillor Georg Stucky, President of the OSA, bluntly referred to the attempt to link it with the European issue as "a cheap trick". LS

Stronger presence

By tradition, the highlight of the event is a speech by a member of the government. This year the honour of addressing the Fifth Switzerland went to the new head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (EDA), Federal Councillor Joseph Deiss. In his speech, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs talked about a stronger international presence for Switzerland. Analysing the current situation, Deiss described the isolated nature of present-day Switzerland. In his view there is a need to redefine foreign policy. He singled out membership of the UN as one of the primary objectives of the Federal Council in the 1999-2003 legislative period. "Switzerland's current status within the UNO is completely anachronistic," declared the Minister of Foreign Affairs unequivocally, adding that we were now the last country in the world to turn its back on a universal organisation.

LS



Interview with National Councillor Georg Stucky

The President on tour

In his capacity as President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA), National Councillor Georg Stucky had a heavy Spring schedule: his agenda included visits to umbrella organisations in Spain, Germany, Italy and the UK.



What was for you the greatest experience during your visits to Swiss expatriate communities?

I was very impressed by the lively nature of these umbrella organisations. I sensed a level of commitment that pleased me very much.

Did you notice any fundamental differences between

the four umbrella organisations you visited?

Yes. The Spanish organisation has seen strong growth in pensioners, including younger Swiss taking early retirement, while membership in the UK has stabilised or even declined.

Do Swiss Abroad communities feel they are given sufficient support by the OSA?

Naturally there are always special concerns expressed. For example, it was clear from my visits that our compatriots abroad want to see more information about Swiss politics and events in the home country being provided by modern mass media like the TV and radio.

What is your overall impression of these flying visits?

Very positive. The link with the home country is extrem-

ely strong. And what constantly astonished me is that dual citizens also still feel Swiss through and through.

Interview: LS ■

AJAS

Planning to train or study in Switzerland?

Vocational training is the most important form of elementary professional education.

Unfortunately there are more young people currently looking for apprenticeships than there are positions available. Added to this there are more hurdles to be cleared before an apprenticeship contract is signed. You need to plan several trips or even a lengthy stay in Switzerland to allow for interviews, tests and try-outs. Young people are advised to start looking for an apprenticeship early, i.e. 12–18 months in advance. Apprenticeships begin in all Swiss cantons in August. Information on how

to find apprenticeships can be found on the internet under www.berufsberatung.ch.

Important: AJAS is not an apprenticeship agency! For Swiss Abroad interested in an apprenticeship, the AJAS has compiled a document containing useful tips, information and addresses. The document is available free of charge from:

AJAS

Association for the Promotion of the Education of Young Swiss Abroad

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1999/2000 Winter Sports Camps for 15–35 year olds

Place, date: Grächen/VS, 27.12. 1999–5.1. 2000 (extension possible to 8.1.) and 15.4.–24.4.2000 in Grimentz/VS. Costs: CHF 700.– (extra costs for extension in Grächen: CHF 250.–). Open to: young Swiss Abroad aged between 15 and 25. Ability to ski and snowboard not required. Beginners also welcome.

From 16.1.–28.1. 2000 the Rotary Club is organising a winter sports camp in Central Switzerland (Andermatt, Lucerne and Sörenberg) for 18–28 year-olds. Costs: CHF 650.–.

Place, date: Grindelwald/BE, 11.3.–18.3. 2000 and

18.3.–25.3. 2000 (one- or two-week stay according to preference). Costs: 1 week CHF 750.–, 2 weeks CHF 1350.–). Open to: young Swiss Abroad aged between 20 and 35.

Place, date: Grimentz/VS, 15.4.–24.4. 2000. Open to: young Swiss Abroad aged between 13 and 25.

Further information and registration:

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Winter Sports Camp 1999/2000 for 8–14 year olds

The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad is also organising an attractive programme of events for this winter. Details:

Place, date: Splügen/GR or Engelberg/OW; 26.12. 1999–1.1. 2000 (extension possible for Engelberg: 1.1.–8.1. 2000). Costs: CHF 550.– (extra costs for extension week: CHF 350.–). Open to: young Swiss aged between 8 and 14. No special sporting abilities required.

A special treat awaits children of Swiss Abroad born in 1985/1986. Between eight to ten of them will be selected to attend the Swiss Ski Association's youth

camp in Lenk free of charge from 1.1.–8.1.2000. An interest in winter sports and a good knowledge of a Swiss national language are required. Those interested in attending should contact the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad. The deadline for registration is 1 October 1999. Participants will be selected by the Swiss Ski Association in November.

Further information and registration:

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