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Swiss Abroad for the Solidarity Fund

Discussions at the spring session of the Council for the Swiss Abroad, the highest organ of the OSA, centred on political rights, Switzerland's image abroad, and the presence of Swiss Abroad at Expo.02. With Switzerland's image abroad in mind, the OSA declared its approval of the Swiss Solidarity Fund.

"The Fifth Switzerland's vote for UN membership was manifestly clear. And once more that makes us very happy." These were the words with which OSA President Georg Stucky welcomed the massive thumbs-up given by Swiss nationals abroad to Switzerland's membership of the UN. In the cantons of Lucerne, Geneva and Vaud, for example, where ballot slips from Swiss Abroad are separately registered, the Fifth Switzerland's Yes majority was 19 percent above the cantonal average. The OSA welcomes this special contribution made by its compatri-



Stefano Iori

Members of the Council for the Swiss Abroad (CSA) at their spring session.

ots abroad who have exercised their political rights.

Ten years of postal voting

1 July 2002 marked the tenth anniversary of the introduction of postal voting for Swiss residents abroad. Over the years the number of Swiss Abroad on the electoral roll has increased from 14,000 to 80,000. "This number far exceeds initial expectations and proves that this entitlement

addresses a need of our compatriots abroad," remarked Georg Stucky. The political rights campaign launched last year by the OSA played a key role in increasing the number of voters abroad. The greater the number of Swiss Abroad who vote, the better they can promote their interests. With this in mind the OSA aims to continue its campaign.

At the same time the OSA is still endeavouring to find ways of making it easier for Swiss Abroad to exercise their political rights. As before, the OSA finds the many administrative hurdles in this area regrettable, and in particular calls for the introduction of electronic voting at the earliest opportunity. However, a discussion on this topic with representatives of the Federal Chancellery and the canton of Geneva demonstrated that various technical and legal difficulties are impeding the rapid implementation of this project.

Yes to the Solidarity Fund

Every year Swiss Abroad are invited to vote on proposals which directly affect them. The next vote concerns the use of surplus gold held by the Swiss National

Bank, and the Swiss Solidarity Fund. Mindful of the image of Switzerland abroad, the OSA voted in favour of this humanitarian foundation, which also has an international dimension. The OSA welcomes the fact that the Foundation can also be used to support Swiss in need as well as victims of natural, political or economic disasters abroad.

Stronger presence

Ambassador Johannes Matyassy, Head of Presence Switzerland (PRS), took the opportunity to present the activities and strategies of PRS to the Council for the Swiss Abroad. The main focus of this institution is on promotional programmes in the USA and the UK. Following a decision by the relevant commission, this is to be extended to Spain. Johannes Matyassy reminded his audience that Swiss Abroad represent an essential element of our presence abroad, and called on Swiss Abroad and their institutions to actively collaborate. The OSA is represented on the PRS commission and welcomes the opportunity to play a role in strengthening the image of Switzerland abroad.

Isabelle Schmidt-Duvoisin

40 years of the AJAS Appeal for donors

The 40th anniversary of the AJAS (Association for the Promotion of Young Swiss Abroad) will be celebrated with a special event at the beginning of November 2002 in conjunction with the Youth Session and the Foundation for Preparatory Courses for University Studies in Switzerland (also 40 years old). Between 3 and 5 November Swiss Abroad students will be able to familiarise themselves with Berne and the surrounding region, find out about political events and take part in the celebrations at the University of Fribourg. Following this, around twelve Swiss students from abroad will embark on a mini tour and be guests at the Swiss Youth Session on 9 November. This is only possible if Swiss clubs, Swiss companies abroad or private Swiss nationals living abroad contribute to the cost of travel for a student from their country of residence. Can you help? Contact ajas@aso.ch / Fax ++41 31 351 61 50

Remo Galli, National Councillor, AJAS President

Ten years of postal voting for Swiss Abroad

Interview with OSA President Georg Stucky

Even in his days as a National Councillor Georg Stucky, President of the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad, was a staunch advocate of the interests of the Fifth Switzerland. Having himself lived abroad for several years, he knows from personal experience the type of problems which can confront our compatriots abroad. One area is of particular interest to him: the exercise of political rights.

Does your commitment to promoting political rights for the Fifth Switzerland stem from your personal experience as a Swiss Abroad?

In the course of my professional career I lived abroad for eleven years: in Germany, the Middle East and Libya. To some extent these stays abroad „cut me off“ from Switzerland: a feeling which intensified after my return. In 1986, when I was a member of the National Council, this experience



OSA President and ex-National Councillor Georg Stucky, initiator of the postal voting right for Swiss Abroad.

prompted me to submit a motion calling for postal voting at the national level for Swiss Abroad. In 1989 the motion was approved and in 1992 the law was changed accordingly.

This year we are celebrating the tenth anniversary of the introduction of postal voting for Swiss Abroad. What benefits has this actually produced?

The entitlement and ability to vote

is an important step for the Fifth Switzerland, particularly because more and more Swiss are living abroad for limited or extended periods. Participation in political life at home strengthens ties with the home country and facilitates re-integration on their return. Moreover, with their specific experiences Swiss Abroad can bring a different slant to referendum proposals. Lastly, by exercising their political rights our compatriots abroad are able to defend their interests concretely and directly. After all, we must not forget that they are directly affected by a great many plebiscites, for in-

stance the forthcoming vote on the Swiss Solidarity Fund on 22 September.

Last year the OSA conducted a campaign to raise awareness and motivate Swiss Abroad to exercise their political rights more frequently. Can you estimate its impact yet?

Every year the number of Swiss living abroad increases. On 30 June 2001 approximately 591,000 Swiss were registered abroad – equivalent to the population of the third-largest Swiss canton. So the Fifth Switzerland constitutes a major political force which could be further strengthened by exercising its political rights more frequently. With this in mind, the Council for the Swiss Abroad launched a broad-based campaign to increase the number of Swiss Abroad on the electoral roll. The campaign has already borne fruit: On 30 June 2001 some 80,000 voters were registered compared with 70,000 on 30 June 2000. This alone is sufficient motivation to continue our efforts.

Isabelle Schmidt-Duvoisin

Translated from the German by N. Chisholm

Spend the autumn in Switzerland

The Expo.02 trip completes the Youth Service's summer arrangements. We offer young Swiss Abroad from age 18 an entertaining week with lots of exercise, adventure and visits to the National Exhibition.

Young people from age 14 can still find a place in our Expo camp in Ins or on the language course if they act now. And for those seeking other opportunities, there is a visit behind the scenes of a Swiss company or the chance to take part in our workshop. All this is combined with a stay with a host family.

Young Swiss Abroad are also invited to take an active part in Swiss youth politics at the Federal Youth Session in early November 2002: a unique opportunity to make your first appearance on the political stage.

Information available at:

www.aso.ch or from
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Translated from the German by N. Chisholm

Swiss Solidarity extends to the Fifth Switzerland

On Saturday 20 April a large public was attracted to Brunnen, reflecting the close ties which Swiss Abroad have with the Swiss Solidarity charity appeal system. During the course of the day 26,115 persons logged onto the Internet and approximately 400 e-mails were received. Many also took advantage of the free phone call abroad (unfortunately, contrary to our information people could make outgoing calls only from Brunnen).

Anyone wishing to enter his or her e-mail address can still do so at www.glueckskette.ch (www.bonheur.ch / www.catena-della-solidarieta.ch / www.swiss-solidarity.org), and register under "Newsletter".

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