

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 67 (2001)
Heft: [2]

Rubrik: President's message

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President's Message

I recently received the latest newsletter from the Swiss Abroad Organisation (ASO). It contains a large amount of up to date information, which will make up most of my report to you this month.

The Editorial (by Georg Stucky, ASO President) is headed: "Make use of your voting rights in Switzerland!", and reads: The number of Swiss living abroad increased once again last year - reaching 580,000 by 30. June 2000. For a small country like Switzerland, this is a large proportion, and is accordingly a central element of Swiss identity. Within the country, the meaning of "Fifth Switzerland" is well recognised - however, this is not yet enough. Members of the "Fifth Switzerland" must become more involved in the political processes which affect them - they have an important and unique role. With their collective experiences gathered from outside of the country's borders, the Swiss Abroad are able to enrich political discussions and voting in Switzerland.

With this in mind, the Ministry of Swiss Abroad has set a goal to substantially increase the number of registered voters from overseas to well above the current 70,000. Even now, this number is higher than the average voting percentage within Switzerland - proving the importance of the Swiss Abroad in political matters - so the campaign will also include increasing the overall participation in voting within Switzerland. It is clear that the influence of the "Fifth Switzerland" in political activity can only be for our own benefit.

A further article discusses the image of Switzerland overseas (by Isabelle Schmidt, Media and Information leader for ASO).

"Präsenz Schweiz", or "Presence Switzerland" (PRS), a new federal organisation recently formed, has a total budget of Sfr. 11.6m for 2001 to carry out the task of improving the "Image of Switzerland Overseas".

Over the past decade, Switzerland has received some unwelcome criticism. So PRS will be responsible for ensuring a fundamentally realistic and positive portrayal of Switzerland to the rest of the world. This will be carried out using various means, including an information platform called Swissinfo, functions and

events in individual countries, as well as a variety of displays around different parts of the world.

The organisation is made up of a number of Swiss personalities, politicians and business people experienced in cultivating Switzerland's image. The Swiss Abroad Organisation is also represented - as well as Pro Helvetia, Swiss Trade Association, and Swiss Tourism.

This year, *Presence Switzerland* will concentrate its efforts in the United States and Great Britain. As well, building and consolidating the organisation will be a first priority. For its part, ASO is pleased to be an active member of PRS, and hopes to have the full support of all Swiss Abroad, who are after all a central feature of the image of Switzerland overseas. Everyone is asked to play an active role in positively portraying Switzerland's presence overseas.

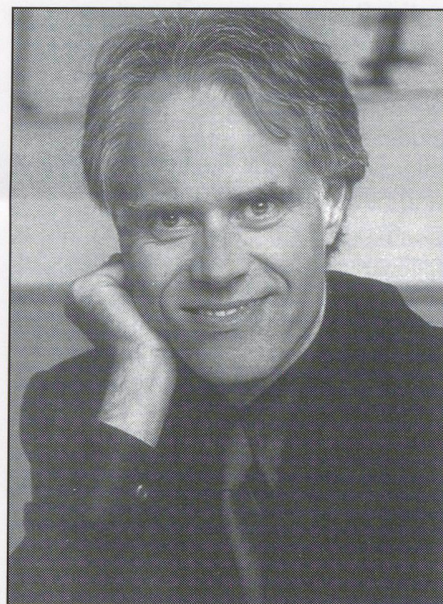
As we are nearing the end of the financial year, I would like to thank all Clubs, as well as "Society Only" members, for payment of 2000/01 Subs. Your prompt payment and support is much appreciated, and imperative for us to be able to continue producing the *Helvetia* magazine on a regular basis. However, there are still a few individual Society members who have not yet paid their subscription - for these people, a payment reminder is included in this magazine, and I look forward to

hearing from you very shortly - your membership is important to us.

Correction: In last month's issue (February), the last line of the first column of my report was omitted. The full sentence read: *By passing the unique and diverse Swiss language on to the next generation, they will then also have the ability to communicate with the people they meet, should they decide to visit Switzerland one day.*

I wish everyone an enjoyable late summer and a good month.

With kindest regards to everyone,
Beatrice.



Moritz Leuenberger, (unrelated to our Society President), the new President of the Swiss Federal Council for 2001.



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