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The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA)

Overview

The OSA is an independent, nongovernmental organisation, politically neutral and without religious affiliation. It was founded in 1916 by the New Helvetic Society. In 1918 the first Conference for the Swiss Abroad was held during the Basel Trade Fair. In 1919 a permanent secretariat was established in Geneva. In 1923 it moved to Fribourg and then in 1928 to Bern where it has been located at 26 Alpenstrasse since 1957. The organisation is made up of the legislative body - the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), the Executive Board, the Swiss Abroad Parliamentary Group and the Administration Team. The OSA works in collaboration with the «*Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs*», «*swissinfo*» SRG SSR idée suisse (Swiss Broadcasting Corporation) and «*Switzerland Tourism*». In the implementation and delivery of the youth program, the OSA works in partnership with the «*Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (FYSA)*», «*Pro Juventute Foundation*» and «*educationsuisse*».

Mission

The mission of the OSA is to provide support and services to Swiss expatriates world-wide and represent their interests vis-à-vis Swiss authorities and the public.

The delivery of this mission is segmented into four pillars:

1. INFORMING

Information for expatriates about Swiss current affairs.

The OSA publishes the magazine «*Swiss Review*». It is the only medium to reach all Swiss Abroad households, providing them with information about Switzerland and keeping them up to date about Swiss current affairs. It reports in a politically neutral way, on issues that are of interest to Swiss Abroad. Special emphasis is given to politics and government information and announcements, enabling Swiss citizens living abroad to exercise their voting rights in a responsible and informed manner and to strengthen their ties with the home country.

The magazine was launched in 1973 and is published six times per year in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in 14 regional editions. It has a total circulation of 400,000, including 140,000 electronic copies. Regional news appears four times a year.

The OSA also publishes the online newsletter «*ASOInfo*». It is distributed several times a year and deals with topics relating to the expatriate community.

«*swissinfo*» is an enterprise of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) in affiliation with the OSA. Its role is to inform Swiss living abroad about events in their homeland and to raise awareness of Switzerland in other countries. The ten-language internet information platform www.swissinfo.ch offers up-to-date news and reports about Switzerland with text, audio, pictures and video. The main editorial priorities are politics, business, social affairs, travel and culture as well as science and technology. The OSA is also responsible for contacts with the Swiss media and for press releases informing the Swiss media and the public about issues related to Swiss Abroad.

2. LINKING

Building and maintaining strong links between Swiss Abroad and Switzerland.

«The Fifth Switzerland», as the public calls the 732,000 Swiss expatriates, makes up nearly 10% of the total Swiss population. The name «Fifth Switzerland» refers to an addition to the four linguistic regions that exist in Switzerland. The Fifth Switzerland forms a multilingual and multicultural patchwork. Present on every continent, it makes an important contribution to Switzerland – hence the importance of building, strengthening and maintaining strong links. The OSA does this through a network of around 750 Swiss associations and institutions worldwide. Every year several hundred Swiss living all over the world meet at the «*Congress of the Swiss Abroad*» which is organised by the OSA. As well as giving members the opportunity to share their views on topical subjects, these conferences also strengthen bonds between expatriates and facilitate contacts with the Swiss authorities and the public back home.

«SwissCommunity.org» the platform of the Swiss Abroad

In 2010 the OSA devised and created the internet platform www.SwissCommunity.org. Its aim is to strengthen the link between the Swiss Abroad and Switzerland. Since then, it has grown to over 30,000 members. www.SwissCommunity.org is a free, high-quality platform exclusively serving the Swiss who have been, are, or will be resident abroad. It is a platform designed and tailored to meet the needs of Swiss people worldwide, a global

network which keeps Swiss people all over the world connected. Plans exist to continuously extend its functionality to include forums for clubs, country groups etc.

«Programs and services for Swiss children and young people abroad»

In association with its partner organisations, the OSA offers a variety of programs and services for Swiss children and young people living abroad. The holiday and training stays in Switzerland provide an exciting experience and opportunity to get to know the country and people and make friends with other young Swiss of their own age from all over the world. For children under 15 years of age, see the new website of the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad: www.sjas.ch/en. For information about leisure and training opportunities for young Swiss living abroad (15 to 20-year-olds) see: www.swisscommunity.org/en/youth/welcome

Swiss schools and Swiss educational projects abroad

In association with its partner organisations, the OSA supports Swiss educational projects on four continents including 17 federally approved Swiss schools abroad, providing education based on Swiss principles for over 7,500 children.

See: www.educationsuisse.ch/en/home-en

3. LOBBYING

Defending the interests and rights of Swiss citizens abroad in Switzerland.

The OSA is recognised by the Swiss authorities, the media and the public as the representative organisation of the Fifth Switzerland. The OSA encourages members of the local Swiss community to bring issues that affect individual members or the whole Swiss community to the attention of the New Zealand Council delegates. If deemed necessary, such issues will then either be tabled at the twice-annual Council meeting – the «Parliament of the Fifth Switzerland», or delegated to the Executive to be followed up. The OSA is strongly committed to improving the legal status of Swiss citizens living abroad. It has successfully opposed the dismantling of the optional old-age and disablement insurance (AHV/ IV) on several occasions. Other significant achievements have been the introduction of the right to vote by mail in federal matters in 1992 and most recently the creation of a «Law for the Swiss Abroad» – the establishment of one point of contact in federal Bern concerning all matters relating to Swiss

Financial statement of Swiss Society

Abroad, consolidating the interests of the growing Swiss diaspora. In September 2014, the Swiss parliament voted in favour of this new legislation.

As a result of worldwide changes in the banking industry, many Swiss Abroad today are faced with Swiss banks cancelling their accounts. Not being able to maintain a banking relationship within Switzerland causes huge problems for many, notably property owners and pension recipients. The OSA strongly believes that this is unfair and discriminatory. To find a solution to this problem is the most important challenge the OSA is facing at present.

Promoting political participation

Over 155,000 Swiss nationals living abroad are registered on the electoral roll, an increase of over 4% compared to 2013. This represents over a quarter of all Swiss Abroad eligible to vote (570,588), or the equivalent of the electorate of a Canton such as Neuchâtel – a very sizeable electorate and one that continues to grow. It is therefore a vital task to protect the interests of these citizens abroad. For its part, the OSA actively promotes the political rights of Swiss people living abroad and encourages them to enrol on the electoral register. The OSA is also active in the promotion of «e-voting» – a highly important instrument for Swiss citizens scattered around all four corners of the world. Trials of e-voting and even e-election in some cantons have been very successful. Encouraged by this, the OSA launched a petition calling for the introduction, as quickly as possible, of e-voting and e-election in all cantons for all Swiss including Swiss Abroad. The government had pledged to introduce e-voting for the entire expatriate community by the time parliamentary elections are due in 2015. The OSA regrets very much that this target has now been downgraded, due to e-security issues. The revised expectation is that only half the cantons will be ready to offer e-voting to registered Swiss Abroad by 2015. In 2004 the OSA formed the **Parliamentary Group «Swiss Abroad»** specifically to deal with political issues concerning the Fifth Switzerland. The Group is made up of 111 members of both houses of parliament – National Council and Council of States – and from many political parties. The group meets twice a year to deal with a wide spectrum of issues.

4. ADVISING

Providing free advice to Swiss living abroad as well as to Swiss citizens

Swiss Society of New Zealand Incorporated

Statement of Income and Expenditure for the year ending 31 March 2015

Income	31-Mar-15
Subscriptions	14,580
Advertising	2,249
Interest/donations	132
Competitions subscriptions - Medals	3,004
	19,965
Expenditure	
Helvetia - Printing	6,771
Packing/Postage	4,382
Publishing	2,160
Stationery/Administration	1,022
Competitions - Medals	3,302
Website costs	902
Bad debts	200
	18,739
Net profit for the year	1,226

Balance sheet as at 31 March 2015

Current Assets	
Cash at bank	3,523
Savings accounts and term deposits	65,619
Accounts receivable	1,113
Total current assets	70,255
Current liabilities	
Subscriptions in advance	-
Net Assets	70,255
Represented by:	
Members funds	
Accumulated funds at beginning of year	69,029
Add profit for the year	1,226
Accumulated funds at end of year	70,255

Auckland May 2015
Carmen Fitzi-Gordon - Treasurer

wishing to emigrate or return to Switzerland.

With its administration team of around 20 staff, the OSA Secretariat in Bern is a modern service centre with a wide variety of specialised services available to all Swiss expatriates: Information, details and advice on legal questions, social security and health insurance, military service, study grants and training matters as well as holiday camps, sports activities and numerous other offers for young Swiss Abroad. The «Legal Department» has been set-up to advise Swiss citizens living abroad

on general legal questions concerning Swiss law. It deals in particular with social security insurance matters and informs those considering emigrating or returning to Switzerland on their rights and obligations.

«We are here to support you and represent your interests as a Swiss citizen living abroad. We encourage you to participate and share with us your issues and concerns»

Peter Ehrler

Elected Council Member of the Swiss Abroad representing New Zealand.