

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 84 (2018)
Heft: [5]

Rubrik: OSA - 96th Congress of the Swiss abroad - August 2018

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OSA – 96th Congress of the Swiss Abroad – August 2018

The Valais city of Visp hosted the 2018 Congress of the Swiss Abroad and assembly of the Council of the Swiss Abroad from August 10- 12. The Council Meeting was attended by some 97 delegates and the debates were lively and animated. The following subjects were decided on or discussed:

It was decided to launch a petition to the Swiss Government calling for the introduction of e-voting on a national level over the next three years. Currently only some Cantons offer this opportunity. Various speakers were asked previously to comment on the security aspects of e-voting platforms, whereby the Canton of Geneva assured their system to be proof. Canton of Geneva has been using e-voting since 2003. The Swiss Post developed another safe system, according to their representative. The petition has also to be seen in the light of some strong opposition to electronic voting efforts by some political parties spearheaded by the Swiss People's Party (SVP).

The Swiss victims of the Nazi Regime before and during WW2 should get a memorial in Switzerland: this was approved and the Committee will make recommendations as to the form and location. In the debate leading to the resolution some members also wanted to commemorate (all) other Swiss victims of other international conflicts. After the meeting, when talking with other Delegates, second thoughts were raised by many of my colleague delegates concerning the involvement of the OSA. In my opinion it is not OSA's responsibility to bring forward recommendations on this subject. I believe it is the responsibility of the Swiss Government to officially recognise (if they think appropriate) the innocent Swiss citizens who have lost their lives during conflicts and to construct an appropriate memorial which people can go and visit and pay tribute.

The Yearly Budget of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad was approved with the inclusion of the publishing and distribution costs of the Swiss Review – which previously was handled by the Department of Foreign Affairs in Berne. The subsidy from the Government is equal to the previous allocated costs by the Government.

The CSA budget is very tight and not commensurate to the task it has undertaken. The Australian Delegate has suggested, that in addition to the Federal subsidy, the Committee should look for subsidies directly from the Cantons, as we are also citizens of specific cantons.

On other Budget matters: thanks to a generous donation by Bank Roche, the Delegates are being reimbursed some of their travel costs to Switzerland up to CHF 400 – a first.

The Members of the Council wish to be better informed before national elections as to the position of all political parties and their candidates in regards to matters affecting the Swiss Abroad. Members also want to know of the voting record/habits of the Parliamentarians in this respect. For instance, it would be good to know which political party opposes dual citizenship or e-voting just to mention a few topics. Under this heading figured also a discussion on whether the Council of the Swiss Abroad should issue 'How to Vote' suggestions.

Representation of the Swiss Abroad in the Federal National Council: the meeting took note of a members group working on various schemes to promote direct representation. No decisions taken.

The meeting acknowledged the efforts of a Swiss Parliamentarian Group, formed especially to promote the interests of the Swiss Abroad. In March 2018 the first meeting took place with CSA members at the Parliament House in Berne. The grouping encompasses 96 members. Your Delegate made specific proposals.

Even for the uninitiated it became apparent, that the CSA achieves its goals and aims only through the help of Swiss Parliamentarians.

The Congress theme centred about the question 'Swiss sovereignty within the European context'. Various speakers tackled the problem. Absolute sovereignty is hardly possible within an integrated and interdependent society. Switzerland alone has signed hundreds of international treaties, is a member of international organisations, adheres to international conventions, all of which have rules regarding arbitration, reference to international tribunals, etc which limit in an agreed way the range of sovereignty. Some Swiss political activists want to resist jurisdiction of these 'foreign judges'. But, turning the clock backwards will be difficult.

The OSA arranged for a range of excellent speakers on this subject, including a speech by the EU Representative to Switzerland. Switzerland's economic dependence on some EU neighbouring countries was highlighted, especially the trade with our northern neighbours such as Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, etc.

Peter Ehrler

Elected Council Member of the Swiss Abroad, representing New Zealand.

Banking Offer Cantonal Bank of Geneva

In March 2018 the OSA announced that it entered into a partnership with the Cantonal Bank of Geneva (BCGE). In this partnership BCGE offers bank accounts and credit cards for Swiss Abroad. BCGE maintains branches in Geneva, Lausanne, Zürich, Dubai and Hong Kong.

The offer is called "Xpatbanking" and includes private account, savings account, credit card and mortgage for property in Switzerland.

Some regional restrictions apply (e.g. United States, Sudan etc.) but the offer is valid for residents of most countries, including Australia and New Zealand.

The general conditions for opening an account are the following:

- minimal amount to cover the annual costs of CHF 72 - 118
- copy of passport
- proof of residence
- explanation about the origin of the funds (e.g. contract, pension etc.)
- short CV
- and meeting in person at one of the branches (Geneva, Lausanne or Zürich)

Contact person (depending on branch you want to visit / language you speak) are:

- Anne de Gendre, Konrektorin, (Lausanne, french/english)
Email: anne.de.gendre@bcge.ch
- Karl Aeschbacher, Konrektor, (Zürich, german/english)
Email: karl.aeschbacher@bcge.ch
- Maria-Teresa Lopez Bouffard, Prokurist, (Geneva, french/english)
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