

Report on the Council of the Swiss Abroad Meeting

March 2020

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the meeting of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) on 14 March 2020 in Berne had to be cancelled. As a consequence - and as a first in the history of the organisation - the 127 delegates were asked to cast their votes electronically in matters that couldn't be postponed until the next meeting.

The Annual and Financial reports, the budget and the priorities for 2020 were accepted with a huge majority. Worth mentioning is:

- The partnership with the Cantonal Bank of Geneva and Swiss Tourism has been extended;
- The three existing websites aso.ch, revue.ch and SwissCommunity.org will be merged into one this year and fundamentally modernised so that they better meet the needs of the Swiss Abroad;
- Due to the e-voting setback, efforts will focus on enabling voters to at least receive voting material electronically until a secure e-voting system is available;
- The legal service of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) which provides free advice regarding emigration and also return to Switzerland processed 1,800 inquiries in 2019.
- The OSA takes on the secretarial function for independent foundations and funds for the benefit of the Swiss Abroad. Examples are:
 - E.O. Kilcher Fund (start-up aid for return migrants in need as well as additional scholarships for Swiss students abroad in Switzerland)
 - Fonds Freiburghaus (additional scholarships for Swiss students abroad in Switzerland)
 - Heinrich Huber Fund (help for Swiss who are in need, especially overseas)

Approved but more controversial were the directives for the direct election of the CSA delegates. They provide the legal basis for broadening the electorate and give all Swiss Abroad registered with a Consulate the right to vote their representative as opposed to elections by the Swiss Clubs. Whilst Australia and Mexico went through a successful pilot project in 2017, the voting system used then is not available anymore. Hence some questions regarding the implementation, which requires assistance of the local representations, remain and will need to be solved.

All in all, the delegates experienced a shortened and partly digitalised version of the yearly spring meeting. Whilst participation happened at low cost and in environmentally sound manner from the comfort of their homes, the drawback was the lack of networking and lively discussions that lead to instant feedback, reflection and better understanding ahead of decision taking. Some of these downsides could have been made up by video conferencing. Given the next meeting is scheduled for August and international travel unlikely by then, this tool may be embraced at the next meeting despite the large number of participants. COVID-19 has also put the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad on a steep learning curve!

Carmen Trochsler
CSA Delegate, Adelaide
April 2020