

Report on the Council of the Swiss Abroad Meeting February/March 2021

The spring meeting of the Council of the Swiss Abroad was held online, and split over two sessions. The first one was held on 6 February, the second on 20 March.

• FIRST SESSION – 6 FEBRUARY

96 delegates participated in the first instalment of the spring session. During the meeting there were problems with the 'Demio' voting portal. It was then decided to conclude the voting for each agenda item after the meeting separately via 'SurveyMonkey'

NEW OSA BOARD MEMBER

Mrs Monika Rügger was proposed and confirmed as the successor to Mr Claudio Zanetti for the seat of the SVP (Swiss People's Party) on the board of the OSA. Mrs Rügger introduced herself briefly. She expressed her pleasure for having been nominated to join the OSA as she has personal links to the Swiss Abroad. Her brother has lived in New Zealand for 20 years and one of her sons lives in Los Angeles.

FINANCIALS

The financial reports and the budget for 2021 were overwhelmingly accepted, as were the new regulation for the compensation of expenses and a new risk matrix for members of the OSA board.

GOALS FOR 2021-2025

The delegates approved the main goals for the term 2021-2025 which have been defined as follows:

- Banking problem: The search for a solution is challenging and ongoing. It is endeavoured to conclude a similar agreement as exist with BCGE with one or two more banks.
- Retirement and Social Security (AHV/IV/EO): Improvements in this area are long-term goals.
- Political rights of the Swiss Abroad: A new e-voting system is to be introduced. The Federal Chancellery will be in charge. The project will keep us busy for the entire legislative period.
- Realisation of a memorial for Swiss victims of the Nazi regime.
- Service contract with the FDFA: The existing agreement between the OSA and the FDFA is expiring and must be renewed this year.
- CSA Elections for term 2025-2028: The funding for holding the elections must be secured. Constituencies are to be defined and countries that are interested in online voting are to be identified.
- Development of a new guiding principle and vision for the future of the OSA.
- Introduction and implementation this year of a code of conduct for the secretariat, board and CSA.
- Repositioning of Swiss Review: An analysis for the new layout will be carried out in 2021. Implementation is planned for 2022.
- Development of online offers for the youth service: new offers are being examined for the youth service. Various activities had to be postponed due to COVID-19.
- Fiscal policy: The reserve policy is discussed with the FDFA. The OSA has reserves.
- International mobility.

VACCINATION IN SWITZERLAND

It has been confirmed that Swiss Abroad can get the COVID-19 vaccination free of charge in Switzerland, provided they have obligatory Swiss health insurance.

NEW OSA WEBSITE

Delegates received an introduction to the new OSA online presence. It was a large project that commenced in 2019 and resulted in the merging of the OSA website, the Swiss Review website and the old SwissCommunity platform. While the name 'Organisation of the Swiss Abroad' remains officially, the online presence is now known as 'SwissCommunity'. A fresh, contemporary branding was developed to reflect the change.

A rather aggressive opposition was raised by the leadership of the German Umbrella Organisation, rejecting what they called the 'renaming' of the OSA and the alleged lack of consultation in the development of the new website. A vigorous discussion ensued. The critic was largely dismissed while at the same time some improvement suggestions from delegates were acknowledged to have merit. The new online presence www.swisscommunity.org/en was overwhelmingly welcomed.

• SECOND SESSION – 20 MARCH

86 delegates participated in the second instalment of the spring session. This meeting was conducted via 'Zoom'.

A SWISS MEMORIAL TO THE VICTIMS OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

OSA President Remo Gysin informed that the idea of a memorial for the victims of National Socialism has received great support. More than 100 parliamentarians from all political parties have supported the initiatives. Remo Gysin thanked all parliamentarians and Council members for their support and especially Erich Bloch, who is a member of the steering committee.

E-VOTING UPDATE

OSA Directress Ariane Rustichelli informed that during the last session of the federal parliament, no less than three parliamentary matters concerning political participation of Swiss Abroad were dealt with: the motion by Carlo Sommaruga, CSA delegate and Co-President of the 'Parliamentary Group Swiss Abroad', the interpellation by Laurent Wehrli, CSA delegate and member of the OSA Board and a postulate by Andri Silberschmidt.

Designed as an interim measure, the Federal Council would like to conduct a pilot program in using the diplomatic mail for the transmission of voting material. The FDFA will conduct a test run in selected regions.

Mr Laurent Perriard, Deputy Director of the Consular Directorate FDFA, in his address to the Council, commented further on the proposed pilot program and announced that the test run is planned in Australia, Thailand and Brazil. Mr Perriard is responsible for Swiss Abroad relations within the Consular Directorate, taking over from Mrs Simone Flubacher, who left the FDFA.

The Federal Chancellery will start tests for e-voting in 2022. The OSA would like to be included in the discussion and will send a corresponding letter to the Federal Council. The goal, as stated in the CSA resolution of 2019, is to have e-voting available for the federal elections by summer 2023.

MUHEIM WORKING GROUP – FINAL REPORT

CSA Franz Muheim tabled the final report of the working group. The working group has established a detailed proposal on how virtual groups can be integrated into the OSA. Virtual groups can now be recognised by the OSA as fully-fledged Swiss clubs. The working group also established guidelines for the direct elections of the CSA in 2025, which were accepted by the Council. Mexico and the UK are the only countries that are able to have electronic voting this year.

'SWISS REVIEW' COMMISSION: CANDIDACIES

The 'Swiss Review' commission can consist of a maximum of five to seven members. There are currently six commission members, all of which will continue their mandate. This means that an additional seat can be allocated. Interested parties are invited to submit an application to the OSA directorate by May 31, 2021.

OSA BOARD

The OSA Executive Board currently consists of nine members. Three members will no longer stand as candidates – Remo Gysin, Roger Sauvain and Sabine Silberstein. Interested members of the CSA are encouraged to apply.

CSA ELECTION 2021

The respective countries and constituencies are responsible for the organisation and implementation of the CSA elections. This can either be done by electronic means (as stated above, only Mexico and the UK have the means to do so this year), by the Swiss clubs themselves, or by an umbrella organisation if such a one exists (as is the case for the elections in Australia). The results of the elections must be submitted to the OSA by June 30, 2021, together with a protocol confirming the election results.

As things stand, 14 ASR delegates will no longer stand as candidates. Elections have already taken place in some countries and five newly elected delegates have been confirmed.

PERSONAL AGENDA SUBMISSIONS

Two submission by CSA members were dealt with –

a) Framework agreement with the EU:

Negotiations are still continuing, and the Federal Council has not yet taken a decision. It was therefore suggested to postpone this matter to the next CSA meeting in August 20, 2021.

b) COVID-19 quarantine measures in Switzerland:

A law was approved by parliament on March 19, 2021 that allows people who have been vaccinated against COVID-19 to be exempted from any quarantine measures. The introduction of proof of vaccination and test results is required in order to facilitate entry and exit to other countries. It was pointed out that this law will be subject to a referendum in June 2021. If the people reject the law, all provisions will no longer apply beyond September 2021.

MISCELLANEOUS

Matters arising from the first session were dealt with and concluded, namely in relation to the Goals for 2021-2025 and the new OSA online presence.

What format the Congress from 20-22 August 2021 in Lugano will take is as yet uncertain. A decision will be made at the end of April / beginning of May.

Roland Isler
CSA Delegate, Melbourne
March/April 2021