

Report on the Council of the Swiss Abroad Meeting July 2020

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Congress of the Swiss Abroad and the meeting of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) that were to be held in Lugano this August had to be postponed to next year. As a consequence – and as a first of its kind – the CSA meeting was conducted virtually, utilising the online conference system 'Demio'. It took place on 10 July 2020 and a total of 86 delegates participated.

The following is a summary of the main agenda items:

TREASURER

Following the resignation of Peter Wüthrich as treasurer of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) for the past four years, Lucas Metzger was introduced and duly elected as treasurer and member of the OSA executive. Peter received the gratitude of the delegates and executive for his outstanding service.

DIRECT ELECTION OF THE CSA DELEGATES

Elections are due next year, and time is running out to have an electronic voting system in place that would allow for the direct election of the CSA. The executive informed the delegates that a number of electronic voting systems were evaluated, and the decision was made that 'SimpleVote' would, from a technical and economical perspective, provide the best solution. However, the questions of financing and gaining access to the e-mail database of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), which is fundamental for any direct election system, are still unresolved. Given this, the delegates are informed that there will be no uniform electoral system for 2021. The Swiss clubs or umbrella organisations are free to choose how they will elect their delegates. This is a huge set-back, considering the successful e-voting pilot-project in which the delegates in Australia and Mexico were elected in 2017.

CSA from Melbourne, Roland Isler, expressed his disappointment that so much time had gone past, yet the most fundamental questions that must be negotiated with the FDFA are still open. Your delegate emphasised that clarity is needed at year's end at the latest whether or not the support of the FDFA will be forthcoming, otherwise there will be no direct election of any kind next year. Furthermore, we must be able to publicise and explain the election method in the first edition (January) of the 'Swiss Review' next year.

THE CSA SAYS "NO" TO THE LIMITATION INITIATIVE (FOR MODERATE IMMIGRATION)

On 27 September, Swiss voters will decide on questions that also affect the Swiss Abroad. Those living in the EU will be particularly impacted by the so-called 'limitation initiative' that was launched by the SVP (Swiss People's Party). If adopted, the bilateral agreement with the EU on the free movement of persons would be terminated or renegotiated. This would have far-reaching consequences for the whole of Switzerland and in particular for the 460,000 Swiss citizens living in a country of the European Union. The delegates spoke out with a clear majority against this SVP initiative..

FEDERAL LAW ON ELECTRONIC IDENTIFICATION SERVICES

The Federal Council and Parliament have created a new law that will make online identification easier and safer for everyone. A referendum against this law has been launched based on the main argument that due to security concerns such an ID must be issued by the state and not by private companies. While the date of the vote is not yet determined, the Federal Council and Parliament recommend voting in favour of the new law. The majority of the CSA also supports this law as it offers clear benefits for Swiss Abroad, particularly in the field of online banking.

POPULAR INITIATIVE 'FOR RESPONSIBLE COMPANIES - TO PROTECT PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT' (CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY INITIATIVE)

Although this initiative has no direct relevance for Swiss Abroad, Swiss businesses that are operating internationally nevertheless have an impact on the image Switzerland has abroad. The OSA is well aware of the importance of Switzerland's high standard internationally and its consequences for Swiss citizens that live abroad. Therefore, the executive felt that a discussion about the pros and cons of this initiative was worthwhile. The CSA decided not to issue an official recommendation.

NEXT MEETINGS OF THE CSA

- Friday afternoon and Saturday, 19 & 20 March 2021, in Brunnen (30th anniversary of the foundation of the 'Place of the Swiss Abroad' in Brunnen)
- Friday, 20 August 2021, in Lugano (during the Congress of the Swiss Abroad)

*Roland Isler
CSA Delegate, Melbourne
August 2020*