

Report on the Council of the Swiss Abroad Meeting

March 2023

Some 131 members of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) met on 17 March in Bern for their spring meeting. The meeting was conducted as a hybrid session, allowing for both a physical as well as an online participation. Hence 82 members met in person and 49 online. In previous years online participants were only able to be observers. This time, however, they were able to vote on issues the same way as those being present in person.

Australia was well represented as all four delegates were present in person – Roland Isler (Melbourne), Carmen Trochsler (Adelaide), Beat Knoblauch (Sydney) and Katja Wallimann Gates (Brisbane).

The meeting was chaired by OSA President Filippo Lombardi. He informed about current business conducted by the Executive, in particular meetings with members of parliament and the director of Swiss Post with regards to the new e-voting system.

NEW E-VOTING TRIALS FOR THE VOTES IN JUNE 2023

At its meeting on 3 March 2023, the Federal Council granted the cantons of Basel-Stadt, St Gallen and Thurgau basic licences for resuming trials with online voting (e-voting) in federal votes. The basic licences are valid for conducting online voting for a limited part of the electorate up to and including the vote on 18 May 2025. At the same time, the Federal Chancellery has granted its authorisation to hold the popular vote on 18 June 2023 online.

Online voting is to be available to Swiss voters abroad who are registered in any of the three cantons mentioned above. For the first vote in June 2023, the cantons are asking for a total of around 65,000 voters to be permitted to take part in the trials – around 1.2% of all Swiss voters.

[See Press Release](#)

NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH ZÜRICH CANTONAL BANK (ZKB)

This new partnership is a continuation of the longstanding commitment by the OSA to maintaining a financial connection between the Swiss Abroad and Switzerland. It is the second strategic partnership between the OSA and a bank. It follows the one entered into with the Geneva Cantonal Bank (BCGE) in 2017. It is seen as big positive, that ZKB has lifted the requirement of a minimum deposit for Swiss Abroad. [See Press Release](#)

STATUTORY BUSINESS

The 2022 Financial reports, the budget and the annual report were adopted.

UPDATE FROM THE FDFA

Michel Malizia, Business Manager/Swiss Abroad Relations at Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, provided updates, in particular about the new **SwissInTouch** app. The OSA encourages the Swiss Abroad to download the app. [See more here](#)

ELECTION OF A MEMBER OF THE CSA TO THE COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE

The newly established Compliance Committee oversees issues arising out of the Code of Conduct for members of the CSA and the OSA Executive. Roland Isler was elected to take the seat reserved for a member of the CSA.

ANALYSIS OF THE LEGAL FORM OF THE OSA

The board decided in a working group (Carmen Trochsler being part) to revise the regulations and statutes of the OSA due to some duplications and inconsistencies in the rules. During the examination of those statutes and regulations, the working group retrieved a previous report from 2015, which considers the legal form of the association to be more appropriate for the OSA. After more in depth analysis the group found that there is no clear choice as both laws present advantages and disadvantages. Furthermore, in January 2024, new foundation law will come into force, and it will be necessary to examine whether adjustments are necessary.

Based on these findings, the working group decided to suspend the detailed revision of the statutes and regulations. The board gave the working group a mandate for a comprehensive analysis of the legal form that corresponds to the purpose and goals of the OSA. As there is currently no budget available for this project due to the tense financial situation, the involvement of an expert in this matter needs to be approved by the board.

ELECTION MANIFESTO 2023

In view of the federal elections in 2023, the OSA wants to play its role as a representative of the over 800,000 Swiss living abroad in the best possible way.

In accordance with its four basic tasks – to inform, to network, to represent and to advise the members of the Fifth Switzerland – the OSA submits the priority concerns to the Swiss parties and political actors in this 2023 election manifesto. Political actors are called upon to work on behalf of the Swiss abroad in the following areas:

1. Ensuring and promoting the exercise of political rights abroad
2. Promote the development of e-government
3. Ensuring the continuation of the free movement of people
4. Removal of obstacles to mobility in connection with social security
5. Ensuring the maintenance of a consular network that covers the needs of the Swiss abroad
6. Ensuring the development of high quality and independent information for the Fifth Switzerland
7. Ensuring financial resources for maintaining the offers for young Swiss abroad and for the development of Swiss schools abroad

The wording of the manifesto was discussed, adjusted and agreed. [See here](#)

WORKING GROUPS

The following issues tabled by various working groups were discussed:

- **Representatives of the Swiss Abroad in Parliament**
- Proposals for improvements of **Bank Access and Political Rights** (Carmen Trochsler & Antoine Belaieff)
- **Communication with members of Parliament**

Workshop on political participation

Why do more Swiss Abroad not want to exercise their democratic rights? And why is voter turnout so low, even among those Swiss Abroad who are registered to vote? E-Voting will help to increase the turnout, but what else is needed to increase political participation of the Swiss Abroad to the benefit of a vibrant democracy? These questions were raised by delegates Antoine Belaieff from Canada and Carmen Trochsler from Australia. Together with [Campus Demokratie](#), they organised a workshop for other council members and members of the parliament ahead of the Council meeting. A follow up workshop with representatives of the cantons will take place in June. Results with concrete measures will be presented at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in August.

A live stream recording of the meeting can be viewed [here](#).

Next meetings of the CSA:

18 August 2023 – as part of the 99th [Congress of the Swiss Abroad](#) in St. Gallen

15 March 2024

*Roland Isler
CSA Delegate, Melbourne
10 April 2023*