

ASR 08/08

Congress of the Swiss Living Abroad in Fribourg

From August 22 to 24 the Congress of the Swiss living abroad took place in Fribourg, exactly on the border between the French and the German part of Switzerland, the Roeschtigraben.

On Friday the Council of the Swiss living abroad had its session. Our president Mr. J.S. Eggly made a clear statement, that the Swiss citizens living outside their home country should not be forgotten. It seems that saving money in the federal budget often has a huge impact on us. The good news were that the Swiss school's budget should not be cut for the next few years. The Aso had meetings with The Federal Counsellors in charge of interior and financial affairs and could convince them that budget planning for the schools can not be done without the security and support from Switzerland.

The network of consulates should not be reduced further until e-government is reality. E-voting is on our agenda since several years and progress is only noticeable in very small steps. The system in Switzerland where every canton is in charge of his voting register seems to be a big obstacle. Three cantons already had trials and e-voting did not cause any problems. But it seems that operating a bank account via e-mail is much easier than voting. Patience will be required, according to the information we got from the Vice chancellor of the Federal administration it will not happen for the next Federal elections. It was suggested that in order to speed things up, letters should be written to the respective election/voting bureaus in the different cantons to show that e-voting is really something which would facilitate political participation from abroad. Model letters should be available to download from ASO's webpage soon. (www.aso.ch)

Money is also an issue for the Revue which is sent by mail to every Swiss living abroad. Half a million francs should be cut from that budget which would mean, the information is disseminated by e-mail or has to be checked on a website. Only those citizens who don't have e-mail access would receive the Revue on request. The Council could not approve this suggestion from the Government. The Revue is the official information for citizens living far from home. Elections, votes, consular information is disseminated only via the Revue and usually the paper is read by more than one person (families, companies). We therefore hope that the revue will survive in its present form.

Next year the Council of the Swiss living abroad will be (re) elected. The distribution of seats will be changed. More seats will be attributed to Swiss coming from abroad and ASEAN countries will not longer have only 3 seats but 2 for Thailand, 1 for the Philippines, 1 for Singapore (which I would be happy to take for another 4 years) and 6 seats in total will be open for other Asian countries which don't have a fixed seat.

After the Council meeting the Congress opened officially with some musical performances by the participants of the summer camp for the Swiss living abroad and a movie premiere to celebrate Soliswiss 50th birthday. Soliswiss the solidarity fund for Swiss living abroad also provides, insurance and saving services (www.soliswiss.ch) Of course there was a birthday cake as well !

The theme for the panel of the Congress was "Switzerland without borders?" and we had a chance to listen to some very interesting discussions as Schengen and the extension of the free personal transfer with the new EU countries are quite hot topics in Switzerland. Our Federal Councillor Moritz Leuenberger had the final speech.

Next year's Congress will take part in Lucerne from August 7 to 9 2009. It is open to everyone and it's theme will be the Swiss Living abroad. Details should be on ASO's webpage and in the revue soon. So if you consider participating mark the dates in your diary.

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