

## **Meeting of the Council of the Swiss living abroad on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2007 in Berne**

The Council met for the spring session with a full agenda. As already stated in the Embassy's article last month – the number of Swiss living their home country to live abroad is constantly going up. We almost outnumber the population of the Canton Vaud which means that our votes can have quite an impact if we all participate in elections. Currently 111'000 people exercise their voting rights from far away. When voting by correspondence was introduced 15 years ago nobody believed in such a huge participation, they expected between 20 to 25'000 citizens would participate.

This year we will have to elect our parliament and political parties start campaigning abroad as well. There will be events in France, Germany, Italy and Austria. Parliamentarians and candidates want to make the Fifth Switzerland aware that they do care about our issues and concerns. Unfortunately until now no Swiss living abroad has ever been elected but ASO still hopes that some day somebody will stand forward and get a chance to become a Member of Parliament. We do hope that in four years we can elect our parliament via e-voting as it is still difficult to get the voting documents on time in some parts of the world.

The "Jugenddienst" is organizing a seminar for young Swiss from 15 to 22 October in Bern. There will be talks by political parties, representatives of the media and the young citizens will get a chance to analyze the federal elections and take part if they are over 18 years old. More information can be found on [www.aso.ch](http://www.aso.ch)

As spokesperson for the Swiss abroad the ASO would like to see the E-Government strategy being treated as a first priority. The Swiss are quite behind other countries and there seems to be no reason why administrative tasks could not be handled electronically as this proves to work in other countries. It also seems that acquiring the new biometrical passport is much more troublesome for citizens living outside Switzerland and ideally this new passport should be available at all our Embassies.

The President was delighted to announce that Africa finally is represented again in the Council and that we have a new member from Peru. The Swiss Club in the Philippines recently celebrated their 100 anniversary. This shows that there is still a need for Swiss Clubs/Associations abroad and that these institutions are appreciated. The new Swiss Association Singapore founded last year has been recognized by the ASO unanimously.

The highlight was a presentation by the Commander of the Swiss Guard at the Vatican Mr. Maeder. The Guard celebrated its 500 anniversary last year and Col Maeder did an excellent presentation about the interesting history of the guard ([www.schweizergarde.org](http://www.schweizergarde.org)) and had a lot of questions to answer.

We also heard a presentation by Soliswiss who will introduce a few new products shortly and are planning to present those personally to the Swiss abroad. They will also travel to Asia later this year and we'll inform you as soon as plans are finalized. ([www.soliswiss.ch](http://www.soliswiss.ch)) Soliswiss wants to be better known far away from Switzerland as ironically most of their members live in save countries in America and Europe and not in politically unstable regions which would make much more sense.

The University Preparatory Courses in Fribourg moved to a brand new building – they call themselves the only “Auslandsschweizerschule” located in Switzerland (more information at [www.vkhs.ch](http://www.vkhs.ch)) and their different courses become more popular every year.

This year’s Congress will take place in Geneva from August 17 to 19 and everyone can participate. Sign up via e-mail [congress@aso.ch](mailto:congress@aso.ch) the theme will be Switzerland’s humanitarian traditions and there will be presentations, talks and visits to the Red Cross’ museum, the UN and other institutions.