

Meeting of the Council of the Swiss living abroad in Berne
28 March 2009-03-29



The president, Mr. J.S. Egly opened the last meeting of this session and one of the first items of the agenda was to elect a new treasurer as Mr. Wuethrich decided to step back after more than 20 years in the committee. He got a gift and a round of applause for always managing the OSA's finances well. He thanked the OSA for never overspending and always being cooperative.

The president was delighted to report, that several cantons are making progress in introducing e-voting and should be ready by the next Federal elections latest. E-voting will facilitate participation in votes and elections considerably. We hope as well that once e-voting is general practice even more Swiss abroad will participate. Currently a bit over 125'000 Swiss abroad are registered voters – if you are not yet part of that group, do register and participate in the political election process back home ! The acceptance of the Bilateral Agreements with EU would probably not have come through without participation from abroad, so we actually do have a voice.

Unfortunately due to cost cutting the Revue will only be mailed 4 times a year to the Swiss living abroad. This makes it less up to date and it might be more difficult to motivate citizens abroad to participate in signing Initiatives and Referendums. But the Revue as well as Swissinfo (swissinfo.ch) on the internet supply you with actual information. There is also the possibility to choose to get the Revue only electronically and the OSR encourages people to do so, it would save costs and probably secure its future.

A initiative by member of Parliament C. Sommaruga for a representation of the 5th Switzerland in Parliament did not have a chance to get through. This presents a little disappointment and encourages the OSA to find ways and encourage its members to stand for election in order to achieve rather sooner than later that a member of Parliament comes from abroad. Political parties should be ready to give topspots on their lists to members from abroad. During the last Federal elections several Swiss from abroad stood for election but none made the necessary amount of votes to have a chance.

During hard times like the one we have at the moment the Swiss abroad can contribute to the image of Switzerland, eliminate misunderstandings and through personal and business contacts maintain and build relationships. We all should be small ambassadors of our home country.



The OSA and Swiss Tourism have signed a partnership agreement. Swiss Tourism is interested to motivate Swiss living abroad to spend some time in their home country and rediscover its beauties during holidays. They also hope that we motivate friends in our home to visit Switzerland. Personal travel tips are often valued much more than a leaflet from a travel agent. Check the special offers on www.myswitzerland.com, like 2 for 1 at the Landesmuseum which are meant only for Swiss living abroad. Swiss Tourism will participate in the organisation of the next Congress of the Swiss living abroad. It takes

place in Lucerne from August 6 to 9. Sign up is easier than in previous years as you can do it via internet www.aso.ch. Maybe you meet up there with a group of friends before coming back to Singapore for the new school year?

In May we'll have to vote pro or against the introduction of the biometrical passport. We listened to argumentations in favour and against it and then a majority of the council decided to be in favour of the biometrical passport. As it will be rather expensive and is currently not available in every country the ASO insists that the Government equips Embassies everywhere to issue the new passports. As in Asia passports of frequent travellers are filled with stamps and visa stickers in less than two years I asked if there would be a possibility to issue passports with more pages as they are valid for 10 years and hardly anyone in Singapore can use it's passport that long. The President thanked for this input and we now have to hope that it is taken further.

The delegates from the USA asked once more if English could become official language at Coucil meetings. As English is not an official language of multi language Switzerland this request was abolished. All documents issued by our Government are either in German French Italian or Romanche and if a Swiss citizen living outside Switzerland chooses to participate in elections, votes etc. he or she should be able to understand and speak at least one of our official languages. The Revue is the only publication issued in English and Spanish as an extra service to those Swiss or spouses of Swiss who are not fluent in any official Swiss language.

The meeting was closed and the President hopes to see even those members of the Council who will not be re-elected for another 4 years at the Congress in Lucerne and of course to welcome some new members to our gremium in August. On a personal note I would like to thank all the Swiss institutions in Singapore for having re-elected me for the next four years and look forward to writing to you again in August from Lucerne.

Sabine Silberstein

