

2009 Congress of the Swiss living abroad



From August 7 to 9 the Swiss from all over the world met in Lucerne for their 87th Congress. It's main them this year were "The Swiss abroad en enrichment for their home country?"

On Friday morning the Council ASR met at the Government building in Lucerne for their first meeting in the new legislature 2009 – 13. We saw many new faces, almost half of the gremium, and had to elect our members from Switzerland. 20 out of 140 members are based in Switzerland whereas the majority of the council members come from all over the world. The board had also to be re-elected. Only one board member had stepped back. I was asked to join the board as the first member from Asia. I accepted and look forward to this new task.

After listening to the President's report we heard a presentation of ASO Deutschland.

The Council emphasized again that the 5th Switzerland is not a neglectable quantity. One out of ten Swiss citizens lives abroad. They are based all over the globe and they want to be informed on everything going on back home and take part in votes and elections. Therefore the incentives of the Swiss parliament to save money on swissinfo (www.swissinfo.ch) and the revue (www.revue.ch) can not be accepted as both platforms customize their information for interested readers not living in Switzerland or people interested in Switzerland. It should not be accepted that funds

are always cut where those who protest against this measure are far away. The Council voted in favor of two resolutions claiming the importance of these two information platforms.

As many Swiss banks refuse to keep accounts of people living in the USA, many Swiss citizens who have had bank relations with their home country for decades are affected as well. The council set up a resolution which will be sent to the president of the Swiss banker's association and to the press protesting against this policy.

On Saturday we listened to some very interesting panel discussions. Raymond Loretan, former Swiss Ambassador to Singapore was part of the panel, together with Swiss author Zoe Jenny (das Bluetenstaubzimmer/ the pollen room) who is based in London, a doctor who went on a humanitarian mission to Africa to help Aids patients and a university professor who moved to Norway as there was no job in her special field of experience available in Switzerland. It was quite interesting to listen to these people and the reasons they had to leave Switzerland.

The Chancellor of the Swiss Government, Mrs. Corina Casanova gave us an update on e-voting. In Europe, Swiss citizens should be able to participate in the next federal elections online. Overseas there are unfortunately a lot of obstacles on which Switzerland has no influence so we Swiss in Singapore might have to wait much longer till we can exercise our voting rights online.

Being in Lucerne in the conference rooms of the Verkehrshaus (Transport museum) we had a chance to see the museum and to go on a boat ride on the lake as well, Soliswiss (www.soliswiss.ch) held it's annual general meeting on the boat and one of the optional sightseeing trips was a cruise as well.

Next years Congress will take place in St. Gallen from August 20 to 22 and it's main theme will be **political representation of the Swiss abroad**. Maybe you mark the date in your diaries. It's always a very interesting networking event and so far not many participants from Asia have taken part.

10/08-09 Sabine Silberstein