

Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lucerne / 11 - 13 July 2024

The 100th anniversary Congress of the Swiss Abroad took place from 11-13 of July in Lucerne. On Thursday, the delegates of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) were convening. Their meeting preceded the plenary sessions – open to everyone – on Friday. The three-day program concluded with a trip aboard a historic paddle steamer across Lake Lucerne to Brunnen.

Some 90 delegates were present at the meeting of the Council of the Swiss Abroad.

Important Agenda Items:

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) has to reduce expenditure due to falling income from sponsors and from reduced subsidies. This means the congress, which was held every year so far, will happen only every 2 or 4 years depending on finances available. The Swiss Review will be reduced to 5 instead of 6 issues annually.

In my personal opinion it is scandalous that the ca 800,000 Swiss Abroad are being treated in such a demeaning way, i.e, the structure of the Council of the Swiss Abroad as now via a Foundation according to the Swiss Civil Code, is old hat and does not correspond to the current needs. The Swiss Abroad should be organised as a public institution under a Swiss Federal Department and their budget should be part of the federal budget. United action by the Swiss Abroad will be a matter of discussion for years to come.

The elections of the 120 CSA delegates in 2025 will happen by electronic means in the first half of 2025, wherever possible. The term is for 4 years. The software to enable these elections was masterminded by the University of Applied Sciences in Berne. The Swiss Review will carry information of and for the candidates and about the election procedures.

Roundtable discussions were held by representatives from the top Swiss commercial platforms SECO and Swiss Global Enterprise: they stressed the importance of concluding bilateral agreements with the EU, mostly for guaranteeing the free movement of people within the EU, which is a must for the ca 450,000 Swiss living in the EU (ca + 55% of all Swiss Abroad live in the EU, mainly in Germany and France).

The Swiss industry is mainly in favour of the Bilateral III agreements, currently under negotiations with the EU. An outcome is expected towards the end of 2024. This was stressed by Francois Baur, Economie Suisse and Carlo Sommaruga OSA.

The Swiss Federal Government was represented through the EDA by Ambassador David Grichting. He stressed the importance of close cooperation with all Swiss Abroad and he mentioned that they support and visit umbrella organisations and their yearly conventions of the Swiss Abroad, whenever possible. The service of the EDA in this respect is exemplary and is adapt to sudden international changes and requirements.

Various Working Committees reported on their findings: such as a direct representation of the Swiss Abroad to the Federal Parliament (remains a difficult issue), increased participation by the Swiss Abroad in Switzerland, efforts to promote the brand name 'SwissCommunity'.

Roundtable discussion between Representatives from Swissinfo (SWI) and the initiative committee to bring in a referendum to limit the fee payable by companies and individuals in Switzerland. The public broadcaster is funded by a direct yearly fee paid by all citizens / companies. The importance of a non-biased public broadcaster was highlighted. This excellent news platform was not questioned, except by the right-wing political establishment.

The traditional excursion took place on Saturday 13/7/24 with a special boat trip on Lake Lucerne with destination Brunnen, where the visiting Swiss were received to great acclaim by a group of Alphornbläser and by the traditional Swiss flag bearers.

*Beat Knoblauch
CSA Delegate, Sydney
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