

# With or without the Fifth Switzerland?

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# With or without the Fifth Switzerland?

Switzerland's parliamentary elections will be held on 19 October 2003. Will there also be candidates from abroad?

Since the last parliamentary elections Switzerland has moved closer to Europe. On 1 June 2002 the bilateral agreements with the European Union and the revised EFTA convention came into force, and another milestone was achieved this year when our country joined the UN. In an age of increasingly fluid borders, ever greater mobility and more intensive communications, our country cannot afford to stand on the sidelines and depend on its special status.

As part of a world which is turning into a global village, Switzerland needs politicians who can build viable bridges across borders. We must continually relate to the interests of the Fifth Switzerland, and the Fifth Switzerland for its part must be assured of strong ties with the home country. Members of parliament are bridge builders.

There are, admittedly, some politicians here in Switzerland who skillfully and enthusiastically advocate the interests of Swiss nationals abroad: witness the continual efforts of various council and board members of the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad (OSA). Federal Councillor Samuel Schmid, former member of the Council for the Swiss Abroad, is a good example. At the Expo.02 Swiss Abroad



Gabrielle Keller

**"It would be beneficial to see Swiss Abroad with a seat in the National Council"**

Day, for instance, he unequivocally stood up for the interests of the Fifth Switzerland, saying that Swiss Abroad "are in an ideal position to know and appraise Switzerland and its inhabitants: geographically distant but emotionally close."

Has not this statement by the head of the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS) provided us with the best argument yet for the active participation of Swiss nationals abroad in federal politics?

Members of parliament must represent the needs and interests of the Fifth Switzerland. And if they have personal experience of living abroad and can leverage their broader horizon in their political actions, all the better. It would be beneficial to see Swiss Abroad with a seat in the National Council.

Admittedly, running an election campaign simultaneously in Switzerland and abroad is no easy task. But it is a worthwhile challenge. It is important for the Fifth Switzerland to be present not only in the cultural, humanitarian and educational sphere but also on the domestic political stage. Our country urgently needs this broader horizon – this distant viewpoint which makes marginal differences disappear and focuses on the essentials, which does not get bogged down in trivia and concentrates on the good of the country as a whole. By the same token it is extremely important for the Fifth Switzerland to have representatives in parliament who know where the shoe pinches and when to change tack. And it is essential that these representatives, in exercising their office, are fully aware of their responsibility towards the home country and the Fifth Switzerland.

In recent years Swiss political parties have become increasingly aware of the importance of this potential electorate abroad and have turned their attention to the Fifth Switzerland. Each of the Federal Council parties operates an international section. It is important for Swiss Abroad to leverage such platforms to raise awareness and promote discussion of Swiss politics among Swiss Abroad organisations. This is the best way to achieve the potentially fruitful presence of the Fifth Switzerland under the dome of parliament.

*Gabrielle Keller*

Translated from the German



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Switzerland's population is changing. The proportion of elderly Swiss is growing, as is the number of young foreign nationals. The population of Switzerland is growing only thanks to foreign nationals and naturalisation.

COVER: Michael Stahl

## SWISS REVIEW

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