

OSA news

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Offers for young Swiss Abroad aged 15 and over

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) is the centre of expertise for matters concerning young Swiss Abroad. The OSA helps young people to connect with one another and seeks to establish strong ties with Switzerland. The OSA provides information and advice for young people, represents their interests and provides them with an attractive range of holiday and educational offers in Switzerland.

Before the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Basel on the topic of “The Swiss at home and abroad – one world”, the Youth Service is organising a seminar where participants will take an in-depth look at Switzerland. This will focus on topics such as migration, politics, culture and mobility. To what extent does the outlook of young Swiss people abroad differ from that of their counterparts living in Switzerland? The group will meet



youngsters from Basel and the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad. The results will be presented to the audience at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad and the group will meet Federal Councillor Alain Berset.

In addition to participation in the congress and workshops, an attractive and varied recreational programme will be provided. Participants will also have the opportunity to explore the city of Basel.

The seminar will take place from 13 to 20 August 2017.

If you have decided on the spur of the moment to take part in one of the holiday or educational offers provided by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) and have not yet registered, you can still take part. There are a few places still available:

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
 Youth Service
 +41 31 356 61 00
 youth@aso.ch
 www.aso.ch
 www.swisscommunity.org

Participants of the Youth Service seminar in 2017 will also meet Federal Councillor Alain Berset.

95th Congress of the Swiss Abroad from 18 to 20 August 2017 in Basel

“The Swiss at home and abroad – one world” is the theme of the 95th Congress of the Swiss Abroad which will be held in Basel from 18 to 20 August. The Swiss Travel System is providing a special offer for participants. They will receive a 75% discount on the purchase of a Swiss Travel Pass Flex. This entitles holders to unlimited use of most means of public transport in Switzerland. The Swiss Travel Pass Flex can be ordered on special terms until the end of June 2017.

Information on this year’s congress (programme, online registration, accommodation in Basel, purchase of a Swiss Travel Pass Flex on preferential terms, etc.) can be found at www.aso-kongress.ch.

We hope you are able to attend.

Please send me the registration documents in spring 2017 for the 95th Congress of the Swiss Abroad (18 to 20 August 2017) in Basel.

Surname/first name:

Address:

Country/postcode/city:

Email:

Please write legibly and in block capitals.

The registration documents are available in two languages:

German French (Please tick the language required.)

Send the completed form to:

Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Communications & Marketing,
 Alpenstrasse 26, 3006 Berne, Switzerland

Fax: +41 (0)31 356 61 01 – or send an email to: communication@aso.ch

“You always remain Swiss”

Davide Wüthrich grew up in Italy and recently moved to Lausanne. An interview with the President of the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad on the topic of “The Swiss at home and abroad – one world”.

BY MARKO LEHTINEN

The theme of the next Congress of the Swiss Abroad is “The Swiss at home and abroad – one world”. One key aspect is how the Swiss diaspora see Switzerland from outside. You grew up in Italy. Do you think the Swiss in Italy see their native country differently to their compatriots at home?

Yes and no. People who were born and grew up abroad definitely see Switzerland in a different way from those born there. People who have lived in Switzerland have clear memories of it based on first-hand experience whereas those who haven't got this experience get to know it through what their parents tell them, by talking to relatives, watching films, taking part in Swiss society activities and occasional summer holidays, as in my case. This gives us the impression that we know it almost like a work of art by Monet or Seurat. From a distance we are able to appreciate it in its entirety and form an overall view of it, but when we get close to it we realise that not everything is as we thought.

You recently moved to Lausanne. Has your personal view of Switzerland changed since moving there?

Returning to Switzerland has given me the opportunity to see how the impressions I had compare with day-to-day reality. I realised that Switzerland was much more than chocolate, Toblerone, banks and cheese with holes in, as people abroad think, but rather a nation with tremendous potential. Personally, I always worried that the Swiss lifestyle would be too orderly for me but French-speaking Switzerland has turned out to be a pleasant sur-



Davide Wüthrich is 27 years old and grew up in Turin. He graduated from the faculty of engineering at the Polytechnic University of Turin in 2010. He then moved to Lausanne to do a master's degree in water management at the Federal Institute of Technology. Davide Wüthrich is also the President of the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad.

prise in terms of social tolerance and multi-ethnicity. Unfortunately, the image of Swiss people abroad is that they are all rich, a little bit snobbish and individualistic. That's far from the truth, but it is only by living here and getting to know them that I have met some very modest and friendly people with whom I have established lasting friendships.

What do you particularly like and dislike about Switzerland?

I like the fact that Switzerland gives young people the opportunity to establish a stable and prosperous future based on merit, something which is becoming increasingly difficult in other countries. And by opportunity I mean stable, well-paid employment that enables them to pursue long-term plans without having to worry about whether they have enough money to last until the end of the month. It may seem banal, but I very much enjoy the scenery and the fact that people love outdoor activities. I like the way people attach such importance to protecting the landscape and that you can get anywhere by public transport. However, I don't identify with the highly family-oriented lifestyle, which means shops are closed on Sundays and you can't go shopping after 7 p.m. during the week. It is certainly a lot less vibrant than the Mediterranean countries that I'm used to.

Some Swiss people have an ambivalent attitude towards the Swiss Abroad. For example, they are calling for the abolition of dual citizenship. What do you make of that? My personal view is that scrapping dual citizenship would be a huge mis-

take. I'm Italian and Swiss and don't see that as irreconcilable in any way. Swiss people will always be Swiss regardless of their country of residence or whether they hold another passport. Dual citizenship can be passed on by a foreign parent and I believe it is selfish to ask someone to give up part of their identity. I think we must learn to live with such multiculturalism and dual/triple citizenships as, given the current mobility, things can only “get worse”.

Other people believe the Swiss Abroad should not be allowed to vote in elections and referenda. Their argument is: why should they have a say in a country that they don't even live in? Do you understand their point?

Yes, their point of view is understandable to an extent. Nevertheless, I strongly disagree with it. The Swiss Abroad are less concerned about some of the issues voted on but there are others (such as immigration and relations with the European Union, for example) which concern them just as much as Swiss citizens living at home. Such referenda set the course of the country's future and I firmly believe that the Swiss Abroad are fully entitled to be able to return to Switzerland one day and find a country with a system in which they believe and ideals that they identify with. Voting is a privilege, not an obligation and, personally speaking, if I don't feel involved or don't have a clear opinion about a particular issue, I don't vote. It's always down to the individual to decide whether to vote and what to vote. As far as the Swiss Abroad are concerned, the right to vote is the only

thing that prevents the political class from forgetting about us.

You are the President of the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad, which was established quite recently. What are your main goals?

Our main aim is to inspire young Swiss people abroad to be part of the international community. Sadly, the members of Swiss societies around the world are getting older, and we need the younger generation to take over; we hope to be able to help rejuvenate our extensive family. We are using the types of communication that young people like best, such as Facebook and the internet, in the hope of reaching as many people as possible. Our goals remain to raise young people's awareness of political issues (without ever taking a position), to inform them about developments in Switzerland and to facilitate communication between people all over the world.

Is the typical young Swiss person abroad interested and involved in politics?

Some are, some aren't – you can't generalise. Over these past two years as President of the Youth Parliament of the Swiss Abroad, I've met lots of people with a very strong interest in Swiss politics but also lots of youngsters with absolutely no interest at all. I get the impression that the apathy is often down to a lack of information or not feeling directly involved and these are things we are seeking to rectify through the Youth Parliament's activities. We are currently trying to encourage the set-up of local sub-groups in various countries, like the ones which already exist in Italy, Austria and Chile. We hope to add other countries to this list in future.

What have you achieved with the Youth Parliament so far?

We're a young organisation – we've not even been going for two years – and the main aim of the first year was to

Theme of the 95th Congress of the Swiss Abroad: "The Swiss at home and abroad – one world"

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) often highlights the importance to Switzerland of the external perspective of the Swiss Abroad. The congress taking place from 18 to 20 August in Basel aims to highlight the extent to which the perspective of the Swiss Abroad sometimes differs from that of their compatriots at home, how the Swiss in Switzerland react to that and the specific benefits of this special outlook. Various viewpoints of Swiss people abroad will be explored.

get to know one another. We need to let the Swiss societies know we are here and while there are not many of us at the moment, we are stepping up our activities and need their full support. In parallel, we have started to develop a network of young Swiss people abroad which we hope to expand over the next few years, mainly through our Facebook group and by

creating a website shortly. We've also managed to obtain a seat on the Council of the Swiss Abroad and will have up to three from the next "legislative period" which is a landmark achievement in itself. Inspiring our young people undoubtedly requires perseverance and dedication. We are giving our all and hope our hard work will soon pay off.

Focus on the electoral roll

The Council of the Swiss Abroad's spring meeting took place on 25 March in the Kursaal in Berne. In all, 66 Council members attended.

The meeting's main point of discussion was a possible amendment to the electoral procedure of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) from 2021. A working group led by Franz Muheim, a CSA member from the UK, presented a report on this matter with recommendations. The working group indicated that future candidates should be entered on the Swiss electoral roll. Muheim said that CSA members should "be familiar with politics in Switzerland". However, the same principle would not apply to voters. Entry on the electoral roll should not be made compulsory in order for them to vote. The Executive Board took a different view. It was not keen to establish any difference between active and passive voting rights for various reasons. This means that both candidates and voters should be entered on the electoral roll.

There was support for the working group's position from the ranks – for example, from Mexico, the second country – alongside Aus-

tralia – where a pilot project with a more open voting system is currently being carried out: "Great interest has been shown in our pilot project under which all Swiss Abroad can vote," remarked Patrick Wyss, a CSA member from Mexico. However, some representatives held different views. For example, Jean-Paul Aeschliemann from France voiced clear support for the Executive Board's proposal. In the end a majority of Council members voted in favour of the Executive Board's proposal. Further work will be carried out on this issue in cooperation with the working group.

Voting also took place in the Kursaal on 25 March as well as debate. Peter Wüthrich was appointed as a new member from Switzerland and treasurer. Hans Ambühl is another new CSA member from Switzerland. In addition, two new Swiss societies were recognised by the OSA – the Swiss Society of Serbia and the Buffalo City Swiss Club from South Africa.

MARKO LEHTINEN



Springboard for education

Switzerland has an excellent and diverse education system. It is also distinguished by great freedom of choice. This means that people taking an apprenticeship can go on to study at a university of applied sciences thanks to the vocational baccalaureate, or at a traditional university by sitting additional entry qualifications. In 2015, over 220,000 young people in Switzerland were undertaking basic vocational training (apprenticeships) and just under 240,000 students were enrolled at traditional universities, universities of applied sciences or teacher training colleges.

Finding the right path is not always easy for young Swiss Abroad wishing to undertake education or training in their native country. A professional advisory meeting can help the decision-making process. Educationsuisse – in cooperation with the BIZ Bern-Mittelland careers advice and information centre – provides advisory consultations for choosing career paths and courses of study.

The issue of paying for education is also often raised. Applications can be made for cantonal grants in the case of low-income households. Responsibility lies with the home canton as far as young Swiss Abroad are concerned. Educationsuisse provides young people with support and advice when applying for cantonal grants. Educationsuisse can also provide small grants or loans itself thanks to various funds (Pro Patria, Gazzetta Svizzera, foundations).

Embarking upon education is not always easy for young people a long way from home. Educationsuisse – in cooperation with the OSA's Youth Service – offers initial support through the Springboard project. Young people (aged 18 and over) have the opportunity to stay with a host family when starting their education to help them settle into Swiss life. If you have any questions about the Springboard project or any other Educationsuisse services, contact our employees by email or telephone or arrange a meeting in person (by appointment). Our employees speak German, French, English, Italian and Spanish.



The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad is celebrating

Advance information on the 2017/18 winter camp

This year's anniversary winter camp will take place at the Tga da Lai holiday complex in Valbella, Grisons (Wed., 27.12.2017 to Fri., 5.1.2018). The registration process will begin on 15 September 2017.

Experience Switzerland's mountain scenery in winter and learn how to ski and/or snowboard or improve your skills. The FYSA is providing this opportunity to Swiss children abroad aged 8 to 14. If you are interested, register from 15 September 2017 on our website: <http://sjas.ch/en/camps/registration>.

Final available places for the summer camps

There are still a few places available for our summer camps. The exact details and the registration form can be found under the above link.

Reductions

The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad wishes to give all Swiss children abroad the opportunity to discover Switzerland in this way on at least one occasion. We can therefore offer reduced rates in justified cases. The required form can be requested via the registration form. The FYSA office would be pleased to provide you with further information.



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Fondation pour les enfants suisses à l'étranger
Fondazione per i giovani svizzeri all'estero
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