

1966 the year of the Swiss abroad

Autor(en): **Weber, Jean-Pierre**

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1966 the Year of the Swiss Abroad

SINCE centuries, the Swiss have migrated to foreign countries.

First inside Europe, then from the beginning of the XVIIIth century, to America, and since the XIXth century to countries further and further afield, even to the antipodes. I hope I am not mistaken if I say that the first Swiss to come to New Zealand were the alpine guide Jakob Lauper, of Fribourg, who from 1863 onwards made several climbs as guide of the State Surveyor, Whitcombe, and Felix Hunger, of Nufenen, Graubunden, who settled in Normanby, Taranaki, in 1867, where a number of relatives and friends joined him and formed the nucleus of the large community of Swiss nationality or origin which plays an important role in that part of New Zealand.

Although the prosperity of Switzerland, among other causes, has led to a decrease in the Swiss migrating to other countries, the old spirit of enterprise is still strong in many, and our compatriots in New Zealand are becoming more and more numerous. The number of the Swiss registered at this Embassy today has now passed the 1600 mark. All over the world, those registered at our Embassies or Consulates numbered, in 1964, 275,648, of whom 119,688 are dual nationals.

The future Article of our Federal Constitution concerning the Swiss abroad is therefore of great interest. It is to underline the importance of "The Fifth Switzerland," i.e. the Switzerland abroad, that 1966 has been named "The Year of the Swiss Abroad."

On January 31st, 1964, I had sent a Circular to all our compatriots in New Zealand to inform them of the text of the then pre-draft ("Vorentwurf," "avant-projet") of this future Constitutional Article and of the meaning of this most important step for "The Fifth Switzerland."

Since then, on proposal of the Federal Political Department, the Federal Council has, on the 2nd of July, 1965, approved the text of a Message to the Federal Assembly ("Botschaft an die Bundesversammlung") on the completion of the Constitution by an Article 45 bis concerning the Swiss abroad. On the 25th March, 1966, the two Houses of our Parliament, i.e. the National Council and the Council of States, have approved the Federal Decree on that matter. Now the final decision rests with the citizens and Cantons of our country; the people's vote ("Volksabstimmung") shall take place on the 15th/16th October, 1966. The text given in the above-mentioned Circular has been slightly modified without alteration of its sense and its free English translation is as follows:

"The Confederation is empowered to promote the links which unite the Swiss abroad with each other and with the fatherland and to support the institutions serving this purpose. Taking into account the particular situation of the Swiss abroad it can enact

the provisions which are necessary for regulating their rights and duties, particularly in respect to the exercise of political rights and the fulfilment of their military obligations as well as in matters of assistance. The Cantons shall be consulted before the adoption of these provisions."

The introduction of this new Article in the Constitution will, among others, create a basis to give to the Swiss living abroad the possibility of exercising their voting right when they go back to Switzerland and stay there temporarily (e.g. for military service or for various civilian purposes). Regarding military obligations, it will give an unimpeachable constitutional basis to the new regulations exempting from the military tax the majority of the Swiss registered with our Embassies or Consulates. It will further give the Confederation the competence of taking over the assistance to the Swiss abroad, as has been requested by the overwhelming majority of the Cantons, in order to simplify and strengthen it.

Besides and above these more or less specific points, it should fortify the moral links between the fatherland and "The Fifth Switzerland" by mentioning the Swiss abroad expressly in our Constitution. It must however be perfectly clear that the aim of the Article is in no way to bring under State control the organisations of the Swiss living abroad. On the contrary, these organisations, associations, etc., shall remain independent from the State. Their private autonomy must be preserved, and self-help, this fountain of freedom, must remain the foundation stone of their activity.

The Embassy has sent two copies of the above-mentioned 67-page "Botschaft an die Bundesversammlung" of July 2nd, 1965, to the Committee of each Swiss Club in New Zealand. There remains a limited number of copies of this Message in the Embassy for distribution to those who may be particularly interested in studying it.

Jean-Pierre Weber

Some Swiss Yodel

By Eleanor Gurewitsch

APPROXIMATELY one out of every 480 people living in Switzerland is a member of the Federal Yodelling Society; approximately ten out of every ten tourists visiting Switzerland want to hear some "real Swiss yodel music." With a little bit of effort and advanced planning they can do so, hear not only the folk music provided on the standard city tours, night-life tours, and folklore and scenery tours, but hear some Swiss people who yodel because they enjoy the traditional old folk music and want to keep it fresh and alive, with or without an audience to spur them on.