

Keeping contact with the "Fifth Switzerland"

Autor(en): **Leuenberger, Heinz**

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Keeping contact with the “Fifth Switzerland”

Every tenth Swiss lives abroad, yet continues to feel connected in some way to his or her homeland. Over the last decade or so, with the advantages of the Internet, their profile has changed. They are now much better informed, economically more potent and enjoy better mobility. Over 111'000 now exercise their political rights. All this has transformed the “Fifth Switzerland” into an economic and political force to be taken seriously.

In order to maintain and improve the contact between the Swiss Abroad Organisation (SAO) and the “Fifth Switzerland” a new bulletin “INFO 5” is being launched. It will be published periodically in German, French and Italian and sent via Internet to politically interested parties and business representatives. Equally, the SAO will continue to stay in contact with the 750 Swiss Societies and Clubs worldwide and associated organisations such as “Presence Switzerland”, “Forum Helveticum” and swissinfo.

The Swiss Revue, published six times annually with a print of nearly 400'000 copies will continue to be posted free of charge to all Swiss registered with a Consulate or Embassy. To guarantee address security, the database is main-

tained by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Every year the OAS organizes a Swiss Abroad Congress. It is held in summer and always in a different city. This year's event will take place in Fribourg from 22 – 24 August. The principal subject will be a debate about the free movement of people. There will be workshops and exhibitions covering the theme “Switzerland without frontiers” as well as prominent keynote speakers. Federal Councillor Moritz Leuenberger (absolutely coincidental) will be guest of honour. Of great interest will also be the Parliamentary Group “Swiss Abroad”. About eighty members of Parliament from across the political spectrum will be lectured by the SAO about subjects of interest to the “Fifth Switzerland”. The Parliamentary Group is led by the President of the National Council, Therese Meyer (CVP/FR).

Federal Elections

Following last October's Federal Elections a number of complaints regarding late arrivals of election documents, incomplete documentation and wrong language have been received by the SAO. People who have experienced problems are asked to communicate them to the

SAO so the exact extent of the problem can be evaluated and addressed (Internet and postal addresses see Swiss Review).

The question why the Swiss Abroad can participate in the election of the National Council but in many cantons are excluded from the election of the Senate (Ständerat) has been asked once more. National Councillor Mario Fehr (ZH) has put a relevant motion to the Federal Government. In its reply the Council is now asking all cantons to make the necessary changes.

Swiss Schools Abroad

The 17 Swiss Schools around the globe can continue their excellent work. On the 18 December 07 the National Council granted the Swiss Schools a SFr 20 million annual subsidy. The Senate had done so earlier already. Both chambers have realized the importance of the schools. They are looked upon as highly important supporters of Switzerland's image abroad. With this all encompassing financial support they can now continue their good work.

Yours,
Heinz Leuenberger

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