

ASO Congress : notes from the 89th Auslandschweizer-Kongress, 26-28 August 2011 in Lugano

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was commenced by all but some of the YOUNGER faction were the first to turn around while the less young contingent continued and enjoyed the rolling farmland scenery as they walked and talked. But it was only 3 - Richard Wehrle, Vitus Achermann and Max Schwitzer - who completed the full circuit and joined the rest for lunch and coffee at Richard and Heidi Wehrle's Karapiro property.



A well deserved lunch

Many thanks to the Wehrle's for their hospitality.

Future Events:

Family Walk - Sunday 30th October: 11am - please note the meeting place is now at the **Information Centre by the Te Aroha Domain on Whitaker St.** There is plenty of parking there. The group will then split and some can drive to Tui Road and others will walk. This will be sorted on the day depending on numbers and levels of fitness. There is also a mountain-bike trail nearby so if older children or energetic adults wish to bring their mountain bikes, then bring your bikes and give it a go. Please bring a picnic lunch or there are cafes nearby. There is also the option of visiting the hot pools after the walk. AZ

*Nicht hinaussehen
über den Rand des
Glücks,
das wäre Glück.*

Martin Walser

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Conference Theme: Direct Democracy in the International Context

Friday was the sitting of the **Auslandschweizererrat**. **Main topics:**

Last year the big item was the proposal for **legislation** to protect and promote the rights of Swiss abroad. Ständerat Filippo Lombardi and 30 others introduced that at the end of this summer's legislative session, but... Although there are lots of warm words about Bund support, progress will be slow (maybe three years), and some folk think support will be hard to gather in a cost-cutting environment.

E-voting. This received the most coverage in the media. Three cantons are trialling it, but progress is much slower than expected, and there is resistance against it in various cantons because of concerns about security and confidentiality. The push is to have it available for election 2015.

Personenfreizügigkeit; (Mobility) 42,000 Swiss live in the EU. The existing bi-lateral agreement which gives the same rights of mobility between Switzerland and the EU as within the EU, has been challenged by a recent referendum would reduce some aspects of that. ASO resolved to ask the Parties to maintain and protect the rights of movement between EU and Switzerland for the benefits of citizens of both. Though there were some strong, and applauded, speeches about not wanting to import criminality (the referendum was about exporting EU citizens convicted of crimes) the resolution was passed unanimously with some abstentions.

Consular services. Service and coverage is a real issue for some countries. Looking for new ways of working with reduced costs, and maintaining a 24hour helpline, particularly for help in catastrophes.

Communications. Great support by users means the on-line services of Swiss Review and Swisscommunity.org have survived budget scrutiny and the paper version Swiss Review has gone up again to 5 issues p.a.

Friday night - A Political Panel with representatives of the 5 main parties. Topics were largely about tactics for handling the impact of the

high Swiss franc - since overtaken by events!

Of course there were significant differences of views, but delivered in the "cordial aggression" spirit of Swiss politics.

Saturday was **Congress**

Main topics

- Direct Democracy as part of the Swiss Identity
- The will of the people (*Volks-souveränität*) and international rights - a contradiction?
- Direct Democracy & participation of Swiss abroad in the age of e-voting
- Participation in European and global platforms
- Direct Democracy as a Swiss export article

The most interesting challenge seems to be the second point - as was highlighted in the *Personenfreizügigkeit* debate the day before. How does Switzerland reconcile its position when the will of the people as expressed in a referendum runs counter to human rights conventions?

For more - there will be video highlights of the Congress in Swiss Review On-line:
www.swisscommunity.org

Mani's Comment

I am questioning the value of the Congress. It's interesting, but expensive to stage and attend. The issues across the world are very varied, and the Rat format really doesn't cater for that, or for much more than rubber-stamping resolutions. (Carolyn says she would redesign the programme!)

The proposed legislation probably will have no impact for Swiss in our part of the world - though it may be a useful vehicle for promoting the interests of Swiss in the EU through the bi-lateral agreements. But - the legislation is likely to take as long as the proposed hotel on the piece of land we all bought in Brunnen (40 years?).

Perhaps there's a better way to engage Swiss abroad in collective influence and decision-making.