

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) or “Auslandschweizer-Organisation/L’Organisation des Suisses de l’etranger”

By Ernst Notz

As your newly elected delegates to the Auslandschweizer Rat (ASR), we took part in the 87th congress which was held early August 2009 in Lucerne. The ASR consists of 20 members from Switzerland and 120 members from abroad representing the interests of the Swiss living abroad. Over 45 % were newly elected members for a period of 4 years from 2009 to 2013. There are 2 meetings per year in Switzerland, one in the spring and one in the summer prior to the OSA congress. Canada has 5 delegates: John Bartlett and Rolf Bruelhart from Vancouver, Ernst Notz from Toronto, Kati Lyon -Villiger from Ottawa and Bruno Setz from Montreal. Ernst Notz and Bruno Setz were replacing Verena Ducommun-Tobler and Ron Favarger; both of them devoted a lot of time to raise issues and assisted the Swiss Canadian community and our sincere thanks go to Vreni and Ron.

Over 100 delegates from all over the world met to discuss the various issues of the over 700'000 Swiss (i.e. every 10th Swiss) living abroad. The president, Jacques-Simon Eggly, welcomed the delegates and the representatives from the Swiss parliament, ambassadors and VIPs from the Swiss business community. The theme of the meeting was “Swiss abroad, enrichment for our country?”

We were surprised that the whole meeting was either held in French or German (with simultaneous translation) and not one word was spoken in English. Among various topics, Ambassador Boerlin addressed the participants regarding the importance of the “Fifth Switzerland”. About 125'000 Swiss are now using their voting rights, either by mail or for some cantons electronically. Senator Lombardi put a petition to the Swiss government in 2004 to define the status of the Swiss abroad, but we are still waiting for an answer. This is of course not acceptable and a study is being undertaken by the University of Neuchatel dealing with the lack of policy regarding emigration; the outcome is expected by spring 2010. The number of Swiss living abroad is on the increase and one out of ten Swiss lives temporary or permanently abroad. Other topics dealt with the publication of the “Schweizer Revue” which was cut from 6 issues to 4 per year. A strong resolution was made to urge the government to issue again 6 publications

per year. The Swiss government is cutting costs in closing Consulates on a worldwide basis. It also asked swissinfo to cut over 7 million CHF from their budget. Complaints were also made by the Swiss living in the USA (about Swiss banks canceling their accounts).

According to our experience it will take a while to see results from these propositions.

The next meeting will be held in Berne on March 27th, 2010 followed by the annual congress on August 20th, 2010, in St. Gallen. Please let us know your problems in time in order that we can bring them up at the ASR congress. We also invite you to look at the website: www.aso.ch

<<http://www.aso.ch>>

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