

96th Congress of the Swiss Abroad

The Organisation of Swiss Abroad (OSA) held its 96th congress from the 18th to 20th August in Visp, surrounded by a beautiful mountain panorama. The UK was represented by **Franz Muheim** (also member of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad committee), **Nathalie Chuard**, **Loredana Guetg-Wyatt** and **Vincent Croset** (from left to right in the picture below).



On Friday 10th of August, 97 delegates from all over the world assembled in Visp for the **constituent meeting**, chaired by the OSA president, Remo Gysin. The main topic on the political agenda was **Evoting**, followed by an update on the **discriminatory banking practices** impacting the Swiss abroad.

Lobbying for the nationwide implementation of **Evoting** is one of the top priorities of OSA. Currently over 750,000 Swiss live abroad, but only 170,000 have registered to take part in the votes and elections in Switzerland. At the moment, only 9 cantons (BS, GE, LU, BE, NE, FR, AG, SG and TG) allow the electronic vote.

We are currently experiencing some **head winds in the parliament**. Critics are concerned about security and a number of parliamentary initiatives have been submitted that might block the progress on Evoting. Whilst there is never a 100% security (not even for the postal way!), the technology should already be advanced enough to understand if any corrupted votes have been placed into the voting ballot. Furthermore, since the launch of Evoting in 2003, this channel has successfully been tested over 200 times by 14 cantons. We certainly do not want to wait another 15 years before transitioning to Evoting. We believe this is a crucial tool, especially for Swiss Abroad (but also for Swiss living in Switzerland) to exercise their political rights.

The delegates of the Council of the Swiss abroad approved in this meeting the **launch of an online petition** calling for the introduction of Evoting within three years.



Your UK delegates fully support this initiative and encourage all Swiss in the UK to sign the petition by clicking here: www.evoting2021.ch.

The OSA hopes that at least 10,000 people will sign the petition over the next three months to put more pressure on the parliament and government.

Regarding the **topic of Bank accounts for the Swiss Abroad**, it has become apparent that there are no easy solutions as all parliamentary moves have failed. As communicated at the AGM in Belfast, it is possible for Expats to open Bank accounts at affordable cost at the Geneva Cantonal Bank. If you have taken advantage of this, please send us any (positive or negative) feedback in order to report back to the OSA.

Some interesting developments initiated from our UK delegates:

- The proposal of **Franz Muheim's** working group to integrate virtual groups (eg Facebook groups) into OSA has been approved. This is a great achievement and another step forward in modernizing the OSA by reaching more (and probably also younger) Swiss Abroad through Social Media.
- **Vincent Croset** presented his proposal for a permanent representation of Swiss Abroad in the National Council (such as many other countries already do). There has been a lively debate around this interesting idea and the Council agreed to create an official working group. The working group is expected to present at the next council meeting a proper due diligence and feasibility assessment.



Franz Muheim



Vincent Croset

Switzerland's relations with the European Union have been at the centre of the Congress on Saturday.



The keynote speeches of Roberto Balzaretti (Head of the Directorate for European Affairs in the Swiss ministry, *picture*) and Michael Matthiessen (the EU Ambassador to Switzerland) gave some indications of the delicate situation for both sides about the future of the bilateral accords. Please find the recording of their talks here: <https://bit.ly/2MPcSdB>

The negotiations are still ongoing and we eagerly await their outcome.

Brexit was mentioned on numerous occasions and it was noted that Berne is closely following what's happening here in the UK. For further information about the so called "Mind the Gap" strategy, please visit the website of the Embassy: <https://bit.ly/2M0qzB9>

The next CSA meeting is scheduled for the 23rd of March in Berne. The next congress will be held from 16th to 18th of August in Montreux. As 2019 is going to be an exciting year with the upcoming elections of the National Council, OSA is working on an agenda including representations by key politicians from different parties to understand their political agenda and to enable us all to decide how this fits with the interests of the Swiss Abroad.

Please follow FOSSUK on Facebook or Twitter and visit our website <http://www.swiss-societies.co.uk> for more information.

Nathalie Chuard, September 2018

Photo credit: Adrian Moser, official photographer at the ASO event.
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