



PRESIDENT'S REPORT
THE 54th CONGRESS OF THE SWISS SOCIETIES IN THE UK - FOSSUK 2019
17th – 19th of May 2019

Dear Members, dear Swiss friends,

During the last year, the Federation of Swiss Societies UK continued to undergo significant changes. We live in a challenging time for many organisations which we are familiar with. Dearly held traditions are no longer adhered to. FOSSUK is no exception. While on one hand the number of Swiss citizens living in the UK continues to grow to now over 35,000 the Swiss societies continue to struggle. Their membership is getting older and it is difficult to get younger Swiss to join. Very recently I sadly learned that the Torbay Swiss club has decided to fold. When, one year ago, I was made president of FOSSUK, I knew what I was getting into, but I do not have any miracle solutions. However, the “raison d’être” for a society like ours to exist is more important than ever. There are lots of characteristics that define the Swiss people and this often includes the Swiss Abroad. The word “Swissness” has entered the vocabulary of the Switzerland. Traditions are booming. In 2019 two of the largest events in Switzerland will be the “Fête de Vignerons” in Vevey and the “Eidgenössisches Schwing- und Älplerfest” in Zug in July and August and both will feature the Swiss Abroad. Within the United Kingdom FOSSUK and the Embassy are preparing a “Jungbürgerfeier” where Young Swiss citizens, who are becoming of voting age, will spend a day with lots of activities at the Embassy.

Brexit is still the first and foremost issue of the Swiss community living in the UK and I have been in regular contact with the Swiss Embassy about this topic. I am very glad to report that the “**Mind the gap**” approach of the Swiss government and the strong efforts of **H.E. Ambassador Fasel** and the head of political and legal affairs **Joachim Tomaschett** have led to an agreement on citizen’s rights between Switzerland and the United Kingdom which will regulate our respective rights after Brexit. While this should work well in principle it remains to be seen if the implementation will not cause difficulties for many of our citizens.

The review of the last twelve months includes several events and changes to the organisation. At the Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Visp **Vincent Croset**, a UK delegate in the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA), presented a proposal to give the Swiss Abroad seats in the National Council. The proposal of the **working group Muheim** to allow Swiss social media groups to be recognised by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) was accepted with a large majority. Many of the Swiss citizens in UK signed the online petition to have “eVoting” available in all Swiss cantons which, at the end of November 2019, was submitted by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad to the chancellery. However, as you probably have heard, “eVoting” has encountered substantial difficulties in Switzerland and an initiative for a five-year moratorium on eVoting has been launched. In addition, politicians now question the voting rights of the Swiss Abroad. In my opinion the best way to counteract these suggestions, would be an increased participation of the Swiss Abroad in the upcoming elections to the National Council in October 2019.



There have been changes to the FOSSUK committee. After the last AGM **Alexandre Tissot** took over as Treasurer. However his tenure was very short-lived as his company asked him to relocate to Amsterdam and he resigned as treasurer of FOSSUK, Very kindly **Loredana Guetg-Wyatt** agreed to take over and I hope that after several years of revolving doors of Treasurers, we will now enter calmer waters. Alexandre also resigned as an OSA delegate. I am very glad to report that we elected **Sarah Grand-Clement** as his replacement as a UK delegate to the CSA. I wish Sarah all the best and look forward to work with her.

We have been aiming to increase contacts with our member societies. FOSSUK committee members have attended AGMs up and down the country, however this effort needs to increase. Many Swiss societies appointed new committee members. Let me use this letter to ask you to please update FOSSUK when this happens. Thanks a lot in advance. At the last AGM, we discussed a revision to the constitution, which will allow Social Media and informal Swiss groups to join FOSSUK. This generated a useful discussion. An amended revision of the **FOSSUK constitution** will be presented at the AGM for adoption.

It also has been a pleasure to interact with the Swiss embassy. **H.E. Ambassador Fasel** has very generously offered the Swiss Embassy to hold this year's AGM and I would like to express my sincerest thanks to his generosity. Over the last months I have also had the pleasure to work with the new General Consul at the embassy **Manuela Ferrari**. In addition there has been a major change at the OSA in Bern. At the end of 2018 **Sarah Mastantuoni**, who has attended the FOSSUK AGM at several occasions, has left her post as co-director. The OSA Executive Board decided to elect **Ariane Rustichelli** as the sole director of the organisation. I am very pleased to say that Ariane will attend this year's AGM.

I would like to conclude with a personal **"Thank you"** to the many people, who contributed to FOSSUK in the year. Most of these are not only dedicated, but give their time voluntarily. First a big thank you to all the **Presidents and Committee members of Swiss Societies** in the UK for your tireless efforts up and down the country. All FOSSUK Committee members and CSA delegates have made significant contributions, including **Vincent Croset** and **Loredana Guetg-Wyatt** initiative to get seats on the National Council for the Swiss Abroad, **Nathalie Chuard** creating a proposal for a Jungbürgerfeier, **Gioia Palmieri** editing the local pages of the Swiss Revue, **Ane Peter** supporting the webpage and **Joelle Nebbe-Mornod's** willingness to take on tasks whenever needed. In addition, **Alexandre Tissot's** contributions to FOSSUK were numerous and invaluable and I wish him all the best in the Low Countries. I also would like to give a special farewell to **Sarah Mastantuoni** whom I worked with very closely over the last three years. Many heartfelt thanks go to **H.E. Ambassador Fasel** and his team at the Embassy who always make us feel welcome at the embassy. Best wishes to **Joachim Tomaschett** who left at the beginning of 2019 to take on a new role in Bern. Finally the support of our sponsors **skincode** and **On-Idle** is very well appreciated.

Franz Muheim
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Muheim'.