

Report from the meeting of the Council of the Swiss Abroad of 5th of November 2022

The meeting was conducted online and chaired by Filippo Lombardi, president of the Organisation of the Swiss abroad (OSA). We started the meeting by saying goodbye to Erich Bloch, a long-time council delegate from Israel, who is stepping aside wanting to make place for younger Swiss on the council. He wishes that the memorial for Swiss Holocaust victims will be realised soon. We all wish him well for his next endeavours.

At the meeting two members were elected on to the OSA compliance committee, namely OSA director Ariane Rustichelli and executive board member Albert Küng from Germany. Two additional members from outside the OSA office and executive board will be elected on to this body at the next meeting.

Filippo Lombardi announced that OSA has received funding for a communication project to strengthen the relations between OSA / Swiss Community and the Swiss communities worldwide. Maria Luisa Bernini, who is external to OSA, was appointed to get this project started. Over the next year she will visit interested countries, including the UK, to discuss directly with the Swiss Abroad. The aims of the project are to exploit better the SwissCommunity brand, to facilitate the communication flow and improve the social networks of our communities.

Laurent Perriard, deputy director of the consular directorate from the federal department of foreign affairs (FDFA) informed us about the new Swiss Passport, which has become available at the end of October 2022. There is also good news on E-voting. The new system, which is provided by Swiss Post, passed a hacker test. It is now expected that in early 2023, green light will be given for new E-voting trials. UK delegate and executive board member Franz Muheim reminded the FDFA that E-Voting is only one half of the requirements for Swiss Abroad to exercise their political rights, namely that the new attempt to introduce electronic identification (E-ID) needs to be set up such that it can be used to distribute voting documents securely online.

Filippo Lombardi presented a draft of the manifesto for the national elections in 2023 to the delegates for discussion. The requests of the Swiss Abroad are compiled into seven bullet points:

1. Enabling to exercise political rights for the Swiss Abroad;
2. Support for the development of E-government;
3. Maintaining the free movement of people with the European Union;
4. Reduction of obstacles on mobility across borders regarding social security;
5. Maintaining and expanding the consular network according to the needs of the Swiss Abroad;
6. Maintaining and improving the distribution of independent factual information for the Swiss Abroad;
7. Securing financial resources for offers for young Swiss Abroad and Swiss Schools abroad.

The discussion led to a few amendments, but generally the manifesto draft was well received.

An informal task force, led by council delegates Antoine Belaieff from Canada and Carmen Trochsler from Australia, performed a huge amount of work and compiled a document giving detailed information of the current status of access for Swiss Abroad to financial institutes and bank accounts in Switzerland. Access can vary from country to country, but there are now several options for Swiss residents in the UK regarding bank accounts. An idea of how to improve communication with parliamentarians was also presented, which will be discussed in more detail in March 2023.

The meeting also featured a podium discussion with parliamentarians from the six major parties on "Neutrality in Switzerland" together with a proposal from John McGough, council delegate from Hungary that "... for the Swiss Abroad neutrality is of highest priority and that Switzerland and the federal council needs to be strictly neutral". The OSA executive presented a counter proposal, which requests "that Switzerland should strive to support peace missions and worldwide dialogue, while adhering to a strict military neutrality, ...". After the podium discussion the delegates voted against the proposal from McGough and adapted the counter proposal, both with significant majorities.