

COUNCIL OF THE SWISS ABROAD: DELEGATE REPORT SPRING MEETING 12th MARCH 2022

The meeting was conducted online and chaired by Fillippo Lombardi, president of the Organisation of the Swiss abroad (OSA). As usual the March meeting has quite a bit of statutory business, which included the acceptance of the finance reports for the previous year and the budget for 2022.

At the meeting Ambassador Johannes Matyassy, director of the consular directorate, and his deputy Laurent Perriard presented us with news from the federal department of foreign affairs (FDFA). A new four-year funding agreement between the FDFA and OSA was signed in December 2021. Another welcome development is that the yearly requirement for Swiss Abroad AVS pensioners to provide a “being alive” document has been simplified. It will be automatised via the registration at the Swiss embassy.

OSA and the council have been pushing to restart E-voting for Swiss Abroad. This process is underway and should be concluded by the end of 2022. Several cantons have shown their interest. During 2022 a pilot project of using diplomatic courier for transmission of voting documents will take place in several countries. In the questions and answers session, UK delegate Andreas Feller-Ryf pointed out that after Brexit Swiss arriving the UK can join the voluntary AVS while Swiss arriving a few months before cannot. He asked if there are any attempts for providing a bridging arrangements. Matyassy promised to look into the issue. Finally, Matyassy informed about the attempts to support Swiss citizens living in the Ukraine and he thanks the Swiss for supporting refugees.

An OSA taskforce, led by former president Remo Gysin, supported a memorial for Swiss victims of the Holocaust. They submitted their report to the Federal Council in autumn 2021, which is now responsible for the implementation of the memorial. The delegates from Israel proposed that OSA should ask the Swiss federal council and parliament to make the use of Nazi symbols a criminal offence as is the case in many other countries. The occurrence of antisemitic statements has almost double during the Covid pandemic. The Council voted to accept this proposal with a large majority.

The Council of the Swiss Abroad also agreed on new regulations for task forces. Many delegates are active in the areas of political rights and are compiling information about access to Swiss banks and delegates were interested in forming task forces. The task force for representation of the Swiss Abroad in the Swiss parliament, where UK delegates Loredana Guetg-Wyatt and Vincent Croset were members, presented a report, pointing out that in France and Portugal their citizens living abroad have seats in parliament.