

97th Congress of the Swiss Abroad

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) held its 97th Congress from the 16th to 18th August in the beautiful lake-side city of Montreux in Vaud. The UK was represented by **Franz Muheim** (also member of the Executive Committee of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad), **Sarah Grand-Clément**, **Nathalie Chuard**, and **Vincent Croset** (*left to right in the picture below*). You can still watch the livestream at the following link: <https://www.aso.ch/en/offers/congress-of-the-swiss-abroad/congress-2019/live-stream-1561627287>



On Friday 16th August, 98 delegates from all over the world assembled for the **meeting of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA)**, chaired by the OSA president, Remo Gysin. The Congress started with a video created by our UK delegate **Nathalie Chuard**, showcasing delegates of the CSA. You can watch the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3me-v5k54GM&t=1s> The main topics on the agenda were **e-voting** and the **framework agreement between Switzerland and the EU**.

The focus of the **e-voting discussion** centred around the fact that there has been a reversal in progress made due to the fact that now no canton will provide the option of voting electronically, including for the 2019 National Council elections.

This is due to the fact that the canton of Geneva and the Post Office have both removed their online voting systems in June and July of this year. OSA is extremely dissatisfied about the situation and has made a resolution towards the Confederation and the Cantons to sort this out. However, and despite this set-back, OSA will continue pushing for a solution and to promote the rights of the Swiss abroad to have access to electronic voting and this as soon as a secure solution can be achieved, and no later than at the next National Council elections in 2023.

The **framework agreement** between Switzerland and the EU, and the initiative on the free movement of people was also discussed. With 458'000 Swiss people living in the EU (out of 760'000 Swiss people living abroad), the delegates of the CSA voiced their worries of the current evolution of the relationship between Switzerland and the EU. The CSA will continue to support the free movement of people and will encourage the National Council to keep in mind the best interests of its citizens living within the EU during the negotiations around the framework agreement. A resolution has been agreed, inviting the Federal Council to accept the framework agreement.

Our UK delegate **Vincent Croset** also gave an update regarding his working group which sought to put in place a permanent representation of Swiss abroad in the National Council. Whereas the current Parliament does not seem to agree with this idea, there is hope that the new Parliament that will be elected this October will be more open about this question. Meanwhile, the group will explore other paths to make the voice of the Swiss abroad heard in Parliament.

Finally, OSA decided to support its members who are candidates for the coming National Council elections. You can view the recommendations here: <https://www.aso.ch/fr/politique/elections-2019/recommandation-electorale>

The discussions on Saturday morning revolved around the October elections of the National Council with a focus on what are the key positions of the political parties with respect to the Swiss abroad, presentations on how federal parliament members have voted on themes relating to the Swiss abroad, and an overview of the ranking of Swiss parties with respect to how closely they back issues of importance to the Swiss abroad (for example on e-voting). Related to this, Swissinfo reminded participants of its application, Smartvote, which provides voting advice, to

help people understand which parties correspond more closely to them and their areas of interest. You can access it here: <https://www.smartvote.ch/de/home>

Swissinfo has also announced that it has released a new app, called SWI plus, and which can be downloaded from the Apple store or Google Play.

Our own delegate, **Franz Muheim**, participated in the electoral roundtable, in his function as candidate on the Green Liberal Party list (Zurich) in the upcoming National Council elections. He was joined by representatives from the Socialist Party, the Greens, the CVP, the BDP, the FDP and the SVP.



The afternoon discussions were around the topic of “What world for tomorrow?” with Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis (Head of the Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland) giving the opening speech (*pictured below*). The topics discussed covered a range of future-focused issues including climate change, tourism in the numeric era, and the future of work.

Of note here as well that **Vincent Crosset** presented on the “Human of tomorrow”, where he gave a very interesting presentation regarding the future of mankind in the age of genetic engineering (*pictured below*).



The next CSA meeting is scheduled for 14th March 2020 in Bern. The next congress will be held from the 21st to 23rd August 2020 in Lugano. The theme of the next congress will be “Challenges for our democracy”, which will look at the issues facing democracy in a globalised and increasingly tech-oriented world.

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

Sarah Grand-Clément, September 2019

Photo credits: Nathalie Chuard, Sarah Grand-Clément