

## President's Report 2025

Dear Friends,

It is with a hint of sadness that I share this final report as President of FOSSUK. As I prepare to hand over my responsibilities, I do so with pride in what we have achieved together and with confidence in the future of our organisation. This year, FOSSUK celebrates its 60th anniversary, a significant milestone that offers not only a chance to look back on six decades of service to the Swiss community in the United Kingdom, but also an opportunity to look forward with renewed purpose and commitment.

Throughout 2024 and into 2025, we have seen remarkable developments: the successful launch of the direct CSA elections in the UK, the creation of a taskforce to reform and future-proof our organisation, and meaningful engagements at both national and international levels. These achievements have taken place amid growing global uncertainty and continued challenges for Swiss citizens living abroad, making our mission more important than ever.

### AGM 2024 and the Congress of the Swiss in the UK

The 2024 Annual General Meeting and Congress of the Swiss in the UK, held at the Swiss Church in London, brought together club representatives, delegates, and community members for a day of reflection, debate, and celebration. We were honoured to receive opening remarks from Consul General Thomas Wagner, followed by an address from Ambassador Markus Leitner, who shared important updates on Swiss–UK relations and expressed appreciation for the tireless work of volunteers and club presidents throughout the country.

Two key motions were passed at the AGM. The first approved FOSSUK's participation in the pilot project led by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) for the direct election of all five UK delegates to the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA). The second motion authorised the creation of a dedicated taskforce to review and reform the structure of FOSSUK, ensuring that it remains responsive to the needs of the Swiss community today and into the future.

The Congress also featured an inspiring cultural programme. Guests heard from **Dr Carole Durussel**, who spoke about her Antarctic expedition and the leadership challenges it involved. Artist **Guilmette Baghdadi** exhibited a collection of evocative paintings, and a powerful theatrical performance of *Valchera's* — a story of migration, identity, and resilience — was presented by actresses **Nabila Dolfini** and **Martina Greenwood**.

A particularly uplifting moment came with the announcement of a new scholarship programme for Ticinese students in London, presented by Unione Ticinese President **Dr Emilie Martinoni Hoogenboom**, with generous support from the **Fondazione Tarchini** and the **Fondazione Ermotti**.

## **Strategic Reform and the FOSSUK Taskforce**

In response to discussions held in 2023, including a roundtable hosted by **OSA President Filippo Lombardi**, the FOSSUK committee proposed the creation of a reform taskforce to address structural and operational challenges. With fewer formal club members and more informal, digitally connected networks of Swiss citizens across the UK, the need for an updated model of engagement is clear.

The taskforce, composed of representatives from clubs and individuals active in the Swiss community, is now working to review FOSSUK's mandate, governance model, and administrative processes. Its recommendations will be presented at the upcoming AGM. The aim is to ensure that FOSSUK remains not only representative of all Swiss living in the UK, but also accessible, efficient, and responsive to new forms of community involvement.

A heartfelt thank you goes to **CSA Delegate Lakshmi Sundaram**, who has diligently led the FOSSUK Taskforce with dedication and clarity of purpose. Engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, from club presidents to unaffiliated members of the community. She had navigated a complex and often sensitive process with openness and objectivity. Reform is never easy, and yet Lakshmi succeeded where many have struggled in the past. Her leadership has laid the groundwork for a stronger, more inclusive future for FOSSUK, and her efforts deserve our deepest appreciation.

## **Direct Elections to the CSA**

One of the most significant developments this year has been the introduction of direct electronic elections for the five UK delegates to the Council of the Swiss Abroad. This project, developed in partnership with the FDFA and the University of Applied Sciences in Bern, marks a historic moment for Swiss citizens in the UK, who for the first time were able to choose their representatives through a secure, online voting process.

Over 1,300 Swiss in the UK took part in the election, and 16 outstanding candidates stood for the five available positions. The engagement and enthusiasm shown throughout the campaign were deeply encouraging, and I would like to thank all those who participated, both voters and candidates, for helping to make this pilot a resounding success.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to **CSA Delegate Andreas Feller-Ryf**, who not only co-chaired the Election Committee in the UK but also contributed to the OSA working group that shaped this initiative. As Andreas steps down from the FOSSUK committee this year, we extend our sincere gratitude for his lasting contributions to the organisation.

## **International Engagement: The 100th Congress in Lucerne and CSA Meeting in Bern**

In July 2024, the 100th Congress of the Swiss Abroad was held in Lucerne, bringing together delegates from across the world. The event was as much a celebration as it was a sobering reminder of the challenges facing the Swiss Abroad today. Among the topics discussed were the financial constraints facing OSA, including reduced government subsidies and the

cancellation of long-term sponsorships. These cuts have already led to a reduction in the number of *Swiss Review* issues published each year and have cast doubt over the future of longstanding initiatives such as the summer and winter youth camps.

Calls for structural change were echoed throughout the Congress. Delegates expressed concern about the CSA's current legal status as a foundation under Swiss civil law and advocated for a more formalised institutional framework — one that would ensure consistent federal support and proper integration into Switzerland's public administration.

At the Council of the Swiss Abroad meeting in March 2025, held at the Kursaal in Bern, the agenda reflected both global instability and domestic reforms. Delegates raised concerns about the preparedness of Switzerland in the event of a large-scale return of Swiss expatriates fleeing conflict or political upheaval. The availability of support services for Swiss citizens caught in crisis zones was also examined, with the FDFA asked to clarify its current response capabilities and identify areas for improvement.

Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis attended the session and reiterated the importance of maintaining strong ties with the Swiss diaspora. He expressed optimism about the Bilateral III agreements with the EU and acknowledged the growing potential of Swiss citizens abroad — many of whom hold dual nationality and actively contribute to Switzerland's reputation and economic success.

The council also discussed the future of e-voting. Positive results in several pilot cantons, including Basel-Stadt, St. Gallen, Thurgau, and Grisons, have generated interest from other cantons looking to adopt the technology. While the path ahead remains politically complex, especially concerning cantonal-level representation, the trend toward wider digital participation is clear.

### **Access, Advocacy, and Communication**

Beyond political representation, other pressing issues continue to impact the lives of Swiss Abroad. The narrow rejection in the National Council of the Schneider-Schneiter proposal, which sought a long-term solution for access to Swiss health insurance for Swiss citizens abroad, was a setback — but efforts are ongoing to find a viable alternative.

The Swiss Abroad also face increasing difficulties in maintaining financial access to Swiss banks. However, solutions remain available. We thank **Banque Cantonale de Genève (BCGE)** and **Zürcher Kantonalbank (ZKB)** for continuing to provide banking services without minimum deposits, subject to annual fees and appointment procedures.

We also note with enthusiasm the launch of new tools such as the *SWIplus* app, which offers Swiss Abroad direct access to reliable news and programming from Switzerland. Meanwhile, the *Swiss In Touch* platform continues to be promoted by the FDFA as a key tool for staying connected to official updates and consular services.

The **Swiss Review** remains one of the most vital links between our diaspora and the Federal Government. Despite reduced publication frequency, it continues to provide news, information, and updates tailored to the regional realities of Swiss abroad. I warmly thank Editor Gioia Palmieri and Design Editor Marc Peter for their outstanding commitment to the UK pages and encourage our community to keep submitting content.

## **Transitions and Thanks**

We mark the end of an era as we say farewell to **Ambassador Markus Leitner** and **Madame Doris Leitner**. Their presence, warmth, and unwavering support have meant a great deal to the FOSSUK committee and to the Swiss community in the UK. As they leave their post in London, we extend our heartfelt thanks and wish them both every success in their next chapter. We are confident that the new **HE Ambassador Parravicini** will continue to support our initiatives with the same dedication and openness.

We also would like to thank **Consul General Thomas Wagner** for his support throughout the CSA election campaign and the coordination of the FOSSUK Congress.

On a broader scale, the OSA community also experienced a transition. After 17 years of service, 11 of them as Director, **Ariane Rustichelli** has stepped down from her role. Her legacy includes the implementation of the Swiss Abroad Act, successful partnerships with banks, a digital transformation of OSA services, and the organisation's rebranding as **SwissCommunity**.

**Lukas Weber** has now been appointed Director and the committee and OSA Delegates look forward to working closely with him in the years ahead.

## **Looking Ahead**

Although I am stepping down from my role as President, I will continue to be closely involved in supporting the Swiss community in the UK. Through my work with the3million, I remain engaged in lobbying on key issues affecting Swiss and EU nationals in the UK, including residency rights and digital immigration status. I am also proud to continue serving on the Swiss National Day committee in London, helping to strengthen cultural ties and foster unity among generations.

Serving as President of FOSSUK, OSA Delegate and Committee member for over 10 years has been one of the greatest privileges of my life. I leave with immense gratitude, full confidence in the incoming leadership, and hope that the work we have done together will serve as a foundation for the future.

Warmest regards,

**Loredana Guetg Wyatt**

**President**