Council of the Swiss Abroad meets in Bern

25. März 2024

The spring meeting of the Council of the Swiss (CSA) abroad took place in Bern on 15 March 2024. The day prior to the meeting, the delegates met with members of the Federal parliament at the Bundeshaus in Bern.

It was a pleasure for the participants to meet fellow delegates from all over the world in person, as well as members of the Swiss Parliament, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the OSA partner organisations such as banks and educationsuisse.








Issues presented and discussed during the two days were:

- **E-voting** in SG, BS & TG was successful so far. GR joined this month and more cantons have confirmed interest. A working group dedicated to establish/maintain good contacts with the cantonal governments has received positive and encouraging feedback. Link: E-voting in SG, BS, TG and GR

- Importance of **E-Government / E-ID**, as in many countries the problem also lies in receiving the voting documents in time. As a great step forward, the National Council just approved the proposed E-ID bill, with hopes high that E-ID is introduced in 2026. Read more here

- Ensuring the continuation of the **free movement of persons within EU.** The official negotiations on the future relationship between Bern and Brussels have begun. More here

- Removing obstacles in the area of **social insurance**, an example being finding a solution for health insurance when adequate insurance is not available. The parliamentary proposal Postulat Schneider-Schneiter **«Secured health insurance for Swiss nationals living abroad »** will be discussed in the National Council second half of the year.

- The importance of maintaining a **consular network** despite the pressure to cut costs - the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad welcomed the decision of the Department of Foreign Affairs to not close any representations in 2023. Still, the **Department of Foreign Affairs** must save CHF 40 million in 2025, so there may be changes within some representations, with staff numbers and duties being adjusted. David Grichting, Director of the Consular Division, mentions also the updated **country specific information** for those moving abroad, available on the FDFA's website.

- Importance of **independent and high-quality information** for the Swiss abroad. The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad's position is to not cut funds to SRG/Swissinfo. More: Media release OSA

- Given the big success of the **webinars offered to Swiss Abroad** in 2023, more webinars on topics relevant to the Swiss Abroad will be offered in 2024. The focus this year will be on Swiss Abroad returning temporarily or for good to Switzerland. Dates and more information on the upcoming webinars here and for the recorded previous webinars (e.g. on Military Service) scroll further down on the page of the link provided.

- The unique offer to attendees of the Congress of the Swiss Abroad by **Swiss Travel Pass** will be available again this year. A 75% (!) discount is available to all participants of the Congress of the Swiss Abroad and allows you to explore Switzerland on public transport at low costs (Kids up to 16 travel for free with the free family card).

- **Banks** present at the meeting, offering accounts to Swiss Abroad with no minimal deposit:
  - BCGE. Branches are in Geneva, Lausanne, Zurich and Basel. Contact Details: auslandschweizer@bcge.ch | 0041 61 226 61 00 (German, French, English)| Website. T&C apply. Please note an appointment is necessary.
  - ZKB. Contact Details: neukundeninfo@zkb.ch / Website. Please note an appointment is necessary.

- A delegate from Israel brought up the question of the impact on Switzerland, if a **global conflict** broke out - and many of thel 800,000 Swiss nationals living abroad were to return. The challenge of such an influx of people would arise on several levels, both logistically, financially and socially. The council will discuss at the July meeting if a working group should look into this issue.

- In the case of a crisis like in Israel, have Swiss living abroad the same rights for support by the Swiss Government as Swiss Tourists?

- More **democratic elections of the delegates** of the Council of the Swiss Abroad in the different countries. A working group has set itself the task of proposing and promoting a standardised process for democratic elections.

- **Increasing the political participation of Swiss Abroad**. This is the aim of a working group established last year. The group is collaborating with other stakeholders who are also committed to increasing political participation and investigating ways to improve the current situation.

- A Working group **"Lobbying/Communication"** is complementing the work of the parliamentary Group Swiss Abroad (consisting of members of the Federal Swiss Parliament) on a cantonal level. The aim is to make interests and expectations of the Swiss abroad better known at the cantonal level and establish and maintain working relationships.

- Review of the **legal framework and the legal structure** of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad. The goal is to clarify and simplify the set of regulations and to ensure that the legal structure allows OSA to carry out its tasks effectively and respond flexibly to changed needs and environments.

Further Links:

- Live Stream Meeting: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F57qZJFLXjE
- Article Swiss Info on Council Meeting: https://www.swissinfo.ch/ger/swiss-abroad/der-ruf-leidet-für-die-auslandschweizer-organisation-heisst-das-arbeit/73763481

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