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The education of young Swiss abroad

Questions to Federal Councillor Flavio Cotti

On 1st July 1988 the Federal Act on the Promotion of the Education of Young Swiss Abroad came into force. «Swiss Review» discussed the innovations with the Head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs.

«Swiss Review» (SR): Mr Federal Councillor, the new Federal Act on the Promotion of the Education of Young Swiss Abroad has been in force since 1st July 1988. What changes does it bring?

Flavio Cotti (FC): The old Federal Act was called «Federal Act on Support for Swiss Schools Abroad», while the title of the new Act is «Federal Act on the Promotion of the Education of Young Swiss Abroad». This change of name reflects one of the main concerns of the revised Act: hitherto, support for the 17 Swiss schools abroad has been given almost exclusive prominence, while the new Federal Act provides for a number of additional forms of promotion besides support for the Swiss schools abroad.

SR: What forms of promotion?

FC: Under Article 10 of the new Act, financial assistance from the Confederation is possible in many cases. The first example I want to mention is a form of support which already exists but which will undoubtedly become much more important in future. The confederation shares in the cost of employing a Swiss teacher at the German School in Tokyo and two Swiss teachers at the German-Swiss International School in Hong Kong. That kind of co-operation also seems to me to be desirable in other cities where a sizeable number of Swiss children attend a German, French or Italian school. Of particular value is the fact that these Swiss teachers introduce a Swiss dimension into their instruction by, for example, teaching a Swiss national language or Swiss history and culture.



SR: On what conditions does the Confederation grant assistance?

FC: First, I must point out that interested Swiss abroad have to take the initiative themselves. They, and not the school in question, are the people involved in discussions with my Department, that is to say, with the Federal Office of Cultural Affairs. Interested Swiss abroad are also responsible for employing the Swiss teacher and they normally have to bear half the cost of that themselves. Aid is thus conditional upon commensurate assistance being given by the local Swiss community abroad and the Swiss firms there. As to the number of Swiss children, the regulations mention 15, but the Department can authorize exceptions in justified cases – especially in respect of the less numerous French- and Italian-speaking Swiss citizens.

SR: Could you give some more examples of such forms of support?

FC: The new Act also mentions the following forms of promotional contributions:

- For joint schools with third countries, for example a French-speaking school in Brazil, which would be financed jointly by Belgians, French and Swiss;

- For single primary or secondary school teachers who, for example, are commissioned by a group of Swiss parents to teach their children in remote parts of the world;

- For courses in Swiss history and culture and in Switzerland's national languages;

- For pupil exchanges and educational stays in Switzerland;

- For publications, educational material and correspondence courses.

I must point out that this is not a final list but simply a few examples.

SR: What you have said suggests that nearly all educational efforts qualify for support. Is that correct?

FC: As far as the forms of promotion are concerned there are hardly any limitations, provided the Swiss dimension plays an essential part. Of course, the education must be neutral from a political and religious point of view and of general benefit. However, I must qualify this by emphasizing that there is no question of individual assistance being granted to individual Swiss abroad. The applicants must always be an association of Swiss abroad – for example, a group of Swiss parents – or Swiss organizations. The assistance should also benefit as many Swiss children as possible.



The kindergarten of the Swiss School in Catania, Italy.

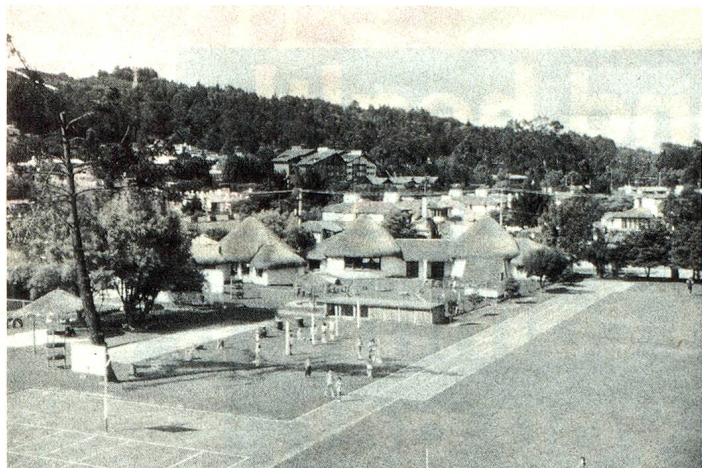
Furthermore, the Swiss abroad concerned are normally required to pay at least half the costs themselves, provided their financial circumstances permit this.

SR: What changes does the new Act bring for the recognized Swiss schools abroad?

FC: In my view, two changes are of special importance: the new method of subsidy and the new role of the «patronage cantons». In future the schools will receive their subsidy as a lump sum based on the estimate; this will reduce the amount of administration in the schools, increase their financial liquidity and enable them to know at the beginning of the school year exactly how much money is at their disposal.

The role of the patronage cantons is also stressed: while the old Federal Act does not mention these at all, the new Act makes them responsible for supervising the school's curriculum. Every patronage canton is from now on clearly competent for all educational questions regarding the school in its care. Services to the school concerned are also linked to this supervision, however. For instance, inspections by experts, the supply of educational material on favourable terms or help with the appointment and further training of teachers are part and parcel of the patronage. Various cantons are endeavouring to emulate the most generous among them in expanding their services. Besides voluntary contributions for special capital projects, particularly buildings, this mainly involves releasing teachers for work at a Swiss school abroad and making it possible for them to stay in the cantonal pension scheme.

SR: Mr Federal Councillor, to end with a personal question: in your enormous Department the promotion of the education of young Swiss abroad is only one small area. Is it nevertheless important to you?



Swiss School in Bogotá, Colombia; in the foreground the thatched buildings of the kindergarten and in the background the main school buildings.

FC: Yes, of course! Perhaps you know that I was once a member of the New Helvetic Society's Commission of the Swiss Abroad. So I have been

dealing for a long time with the worries and needs of the Swiss abroad. I have sympathy and understanding for their concerns. PF

Health insurance

Special features of the Swiss system

Inevitably, health policy is closely linked to social policy, so that in many countries the health insurance system is firmly anchored in the state social schemes (it is compulsory and premiums are levied as a percentage of the salary). Not so in Switzerland, where the health system is in large measure a matter for the cantons. The Confederation does, however, issue basic legal provisions.

But, apart from that, the health insurance schemes are free to frame their own regulations in respect of the admission of members and the payment of benefits.

Thus it is that for many of our compatriots, when they decide at an advanced age to return to their old home, it is difficult to find refuge in a Swiss health insurance scheme and to do so on favourable terms.

Social insurance agreements

Admittedly, social security agreements which our country has concluded with various – mostly European – states help our compatriots who have lived in those states to be admitted to Swiss health insurance schemes without new restrictions and without age limits. So far, so good. However, what returning emigrants criticize again and again is the fact that, despite interstate agreements, the years spent abroad in a foreign health insurance scheme are not taken into account when the premiums are calculated. Here, only the Solidarity Fund agreement can help.

Gap closed

The agreement between the Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad and the Swiss Grütli – in force since 1st January 1988 –

now offers every compatriot abroad who would like sooner or later to return to Switzerland a means of practical self-help, namely, the opportunity to join the Swiss health insurance system at any time on favourable terms.

1. For this opportunity he pays, while abroad, a modest *risk or «waiting» premium*.

2. When he returns temporarily or permanently to Switzerland the member benefits from the lower health scheme premiums because the age at which he joined the agreement abroad counts as his *age of entry* to the Grütli on his return (see advertisement on last page).

The Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad, Gutenbergstr. 6, CH-3001 Berne, will be pleased to give advice. IN

Federal ballots

4th December 1988

■ Town-country initiative against land speculation

■ Initiative in favour of the 40-hour week

■ Initiative in favour of the restriction of immigration

Remember the time limit

Name and place of origin

Under Swiss law the husband's surname is the married couple's family surname. However, an engaged woman can make a declaration that she wishes to place the surname she has borne hitherto in front of the family surname. If she is living abroad she must make a written declaration at the competent Swiss embassy or consulate **before the civil marriage ceremony takes place**. Dual nationals can do this as a precaution, since it cannot at present be said with certainty whether the declaration will be recognized.

Women who married before 1st January 1988 can still make the surname declaration **up to the end of 1988**.

Important: binding information on whether the country of residence will recognize this use of the former surname can be given only by the authorities of the country concerned.

Place of origin

As before, the wife acquires her husband's cantonal and communal citizenship (place of origin) on marriage. However, what is new is that she no longer loses the citizenship she had when she was single. A declaration as in the case of the surname is not necessary.

Women who **married before 1st January 1988** and who wish to resume the citizenship they had when they were single can **still** make a written declaration to that effect at the competent Swiss embassy or consulate **up to the end of 1988**.

Printed forms are available at the Swiss embassies and consulates for both these declarations. EDA/MZ

Marriage of a Swiss woman

A Swiss woman wishing to retain her Swiss nationality on marrying a foreign national *must* make a declaration in writing to that effect *before the marriage* on a form obtainable from the Swiss diplomatic and consular missions abroad.

Editor (Official Communications), Service for the Swiss Abroad, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.