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Extracts from the President's Report to the Swiss Abroad Council Meeting 23/03/03

Federal Finances

After a period of prudent revitalisation, the patient's state of health has undergone an abrupt decline. The expenditure - except for the one-off costs of Expo 2002 and the Swissair debacle - was otherwise largely kept under control. Due to the unexpected economic downturn, income fell dramatically behind expectations. Result: a deficit of 3.3 billion instead of the budgeted CHF 350 surplus! This negative outcome has forced the Minister of Finance to sharpen his pencil and order a 1 % reduction in expenditure across the board. The Swiss Abroad will not be exempt from this sharp pencil. The printing and mailing of the "Swiss Review", subsidised by the Federal Government, will be reduced to five editions immediately. For how long this curtailment will stay in place is at this early stage unclear. But not only the Federal Government finished the year in the RED, the Swiss Abroad Organisation (SAO) too is reporting a deficit. Unexpected expenditure arose from non-budgeted Expo 2002 projects and lower than expected income. Luckily the SAO is not only debt free, it still has a respectable reserve.

At the November 2002 Council Committee Meeting, it was decided that delegates and / or deputy delegates be paid an attendance fee of CHF 80.00. This amount can in no way pay for delegates' travel and accommodation expenses - it is meant as a "thank you" for taking part in the running of the Swiss Abroad Council.

Swiss Residents in the Argentine

The once very prosperous Argentina registers the largest Swiss community in the whole of the Americas. Buenos Aires and regions along the Brazilian frontier were once privileged destinations. During the second half of the 19th century and up until the 1930s large numbers of immigrants found a new life. During that time Federal authorities were actively engaged in promoting - even by way of financial support - emigration to those parts.

Today there are 15,000 compatriots in Argentina. Several times over are the Swiss descendants that today no longer qualify for Swiss citizenship. The irony of their misfortune is that they are now confronted with exactly the same problems their ancestors were confronted with and tried to leave behind all those years ago. Over the past twelve months more than 1000 Argentine-Swiss have returned home. Many are forced to seek social support of one kind or another. For those remaining

behind, providing for their old age presents a very special problem. About half of them are insured with the AHV / IV, but with the rapid devaluation of the Peso, the AHV premiums have trebled, and to make matters even worse bank accounts were frozen by Government Decree. If you miss paying your dues for two years you are automatically excluded from the AHV. The SAO has made approaches to Federal Office for Social Security, but had little success. The matter has now been taken up by the Federal Parliament, as well as by Ambassador Suter, the new head of the Swiss Abroad Section in the Foreign Affairs Department.

Political Clout of the Fifth Switzerland

More and more the fifth Switzerland is becoming a strong player on the political landscape. This was once again illustrated on 24 November 2002 when the Asylum Misuse Initiative was voted on. Without the Swiss Abroad vote there would have been a positive result. On the one hand, a majority of cantons were in favour, the popular vote however was 51.1 % to 49.9% against. The difference between the "Nays" and "Yeas" was a mere 4208 votes, the closest outcome ever recorded. In the three cantons where votes from abroad are counted separately, the No's averaged over 70%. The outcome is expected to put the political parties on notice that the 600,000 strong Swiss community living abroad is becoming a power to be taken into account.

Heinz Leuenberger
Delegate to the Swiss Abroad

Decide carefully, exactly what you want in life, then work like mad to make sure you get it!

*Hector Crawford (1913 - 1991) -
Australian television programme maker.*

Kindness is a language, the Deaf can hear and the Blind can see

Courtesy is contagious - let's start an epidemic!!!

Worry is like a Rocking Chair - something to do, but getting nowhere!!!

Anyone who does not know how to make the most of his luck has no right to complain if it passes him by.

Miguel de Cervantes (1547 - 1616) - Spanish author.