



**PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR THE
55th AGM OF FEDERATION OF SWISS SOCIETIES IN THE UK - FOSSUK 2020
12th of December 2020**

Dear Members, dear Swiss friends,

The last FOSSUK AGM took place one and a half years ago. As we now know, in 2020 the world has changed dramatically in ways most of us never expected. The lives of all humankind were affected, including the Swiss Abroad in the United Kingdom and worldwide and people living in Switzerland. FOSSUK had to cancel our annual congress and the AGM, which were supposed to take place on the first weekend of June 2020 including a visit to Greenwich, but this was just one of so many events that did not take place during this year.

That said I would like to start this report by looking back to happier times. It seems such a long time ago, but a lot of good things happened during 2019. At the end of June 2019, the Embassy and FOSSUK welcomed dozens of Swiss citizens born in 2000 and 2001 for a **Jungbürgerfeier / fête de jeunes citoyens / festa dei giovani cittadini** – the occasion traditionally marked in Switzerland when young citizens become of legal age to execute their voting rights. These events have been popular with the Swiss Abroad worldwide and I hope this will become a regular occasion. In August 2019 the **Congress of the Swiss Abroad** was held in Montreux. This event was a tremendous success and you can find many pictures of happy faces in the Swiss revue and on social media with Lac Lemman and the mountains providing a beautiful backdrop. The congress was well covered by the Swiss media, in particular due to the presentations on voting patterns of the Swiss Abroad in view of the **elections to the National Council** in October 2019, including a panel discussion with members of the Swiss parliament and candidates presenting their parties positions to the Swiss Abroad. Yours truly took part in this debate, as I was selected to stand for election for National Council. Unfortunately for the Swiss Abroad **eVoting** was stopped in 2019, leading to a significantly lower participation of the Swiss Abroad in the elections. We need to find ways to increase this participation again in order for the Swiss Abroad to be counted.

As we live in a global world, local traditions are more popular than ever. In July, the Swiss Abroad had their own stand in the “Fête de Vignerons” in Vevey. **Laurent Wehrli**, mayor of Montreux and member of the executive of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) invited a delegation with **Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis** and OSA to attend for a day, including the spectacular evening show, which was made even more dramatic when a thunderstorm and lightning closed in over the venue and the show had to be stopped mid-time. However, this did not stop us having a good time. I was less impressed when, on the next evening, the same weather pattern caused my return flight to Edinburgh to be cancelled. In August 2019, the “**Eidgenössisches Schwing- und Älplerfest**” (**EASF 2019**) took place in Zug with Swiss Abroads in the ring and among the spectators. Given that this year's Swiss wrestling season had to be cancelled like so many other sports events, the EASF 2019 becomes even more memorable in hindsight. In addition, the Swiss clubs up and down the UK, and with **H.E. Ambassador Fasel** at the Swiss church in London, celebrated the **Swiss national day (1st August)** with “bratwurst” and “cervelat”. I conclude



that the Swiss know how to celebrate, despite this maybe not being the most common image of Switzerland around the world.

And then in March 2020 the world changed. The **coronavirus pandemic (Covid)** hit with full force and all countries around the globe decided to lock down people's daily lives. The council of the Swiss Abroad had to cancel their meeting planned for mid March. The Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Lugano in August 2020 also could not take place, as, despite the easing of restrictions over the summer, larger events were not possible. At the time of writing we are in the midst of a second Covid wave and people are again encouraged or forced to limit their interactions as much as possible. The toll of this virus has already been huge with the reported totals of about 60 million infections and 1.4 million fatalities only being lower estimates. By now every one of us will personally know people who have been infected and become ill. Hopefully they have recovered. Each person who died from Covid made an empty chair in someone's family and our sympathy goes to all who mourn a loved one. We want to remember all those lives. In addition, many people lost their jobs and over 1.6 million people are now unemployed in the UK. Consequently mental and physical health issues are on the rise. While we are trying to adjust, e.g. by working from home when possible, we all know that there will be a tough winter ahead for us. There is hope on the horizon as we recently learned that vaccination trials are going well and first vaccines will now likely become available in 2021.

A consequence of the lockdown is that meetings and conferences with remote participation suddenly not only became possible; these are now the modus operandi. FOSSUK committee held its meetings by video conference. OSA executive meetings where I am a member were held by video conference. The Council of the Swiss Abroad held a video conference meeting on 10th July, where it bid farewell to executive committee member **Peter Wüthrich**, who had been the OSA treasurer. Next year, the **elections of the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA)** for 2021 to 2025 will take place. Unfortunately, no electronic voting system will be made available. This is very disappointing, in particular for the members of the task force that I led, and who put in so much time and effort in agreeing and preparing regulations and guidelines. Within the UK the **elections of our five CSA delegates** will be coordinated by FOSSUK, supported by the embassy. **Camilla Ghislanzoni** from the New Helvetic Society has kindly agreed to coordinate these elections. A newsletter has already been sent out by the embassy. Up and down the UK Swiss societies had to adjust to online events. Social media is important for these contacts. People were creative. As an example I list the initiative of **Sepp Jans** from the Swiss Club Edinburgh who regularly conducts guided walks, which with the usual distancing rules are allowed under current regulations.

On 31st January 2020 the United Kingdom exited the European Union (**Brexit**). As reported a year ago. Switzerland and the UK reached a mutual agreement on citizen's rights between Switzerland and the UK. If you do not possess UK citizenship you should already have applied for Settled Status, if not you must do so by 30th June 2021. Currently the UK is in a transition period, scheduled to end on 31 Dec 2020. While the pandemic took Brexit of the spotlight it is difficult for someone with a Swiss mindset to comprehend that the outcome of the negotiations are not known yet. Despite the difficulties in 2020 due to Covid, we will soon realise that the repercussion of Brexit will be larger and longer lasting. Brexit will continue to affect the livelihoods of people and the economy in the UK during the next decade.



While good news seems to be rare this year, in September 2020 the Swiss electorate decisively voted to reject a populist initiative to stop free movement of people between Switzerland and the EU, and putting Switzerland in the centre of Europe where it belongs. This result avoids uncertainty and fewer rights for the Swiss who want to live, love, study, work or retire in the EU. Looking ahead there is hope that 2020 was not cancelled, but just delayed. I am looking forward to the Olympic games 2020, the Euro 2020 and the **Swiss Abroad Congress in Lugano**, all happening in 2021.

I would like to conclude with a personal “**Thank you**” to the many people who contributed to FOSSUK, including the **Presidents and Committee members of Swiss Societies** in the UK for their voluntary efforts, in particular for being creative during the pandemic with virtual gatherings. **FOSSUK Committee members** and **CSA delegates** have made significant contributions, including **Vincent Croset** and **Loredana Guetg-Wyatt** with an initiative to get seats on the National Council for the Swiss Abroad, **Nathalie Chuard** in taking a leading role in the organisation of the Jungbürgerfeier and the Swiss national day, **Sarah Grand-Clement** writing the delegates report, **Gioia Palmieri** editing the local pages of the Swiss Revue, **Ane Peter** supporting the webpage and **Joelle Nebbe-Mornod’s** willingness to take on tasks whenever needed. Many heartfelt thanks go to **H.E. Ambassador Alexandre Fasel** and his team at the embassy, in particular **Manuela Ferrari**, who is usually my first point of contact. In addition, the support of our sponsors **skincode** and **On-Idle** is very well appreciated.

Finally on a personal level, I have been aware that my list of activities has been growing year-on-year during the last decade with new significant involvements professionally as well as in Swiss politics. I came to the conclusion that now is the time to limit these. Thus I have decided to step down as president of FOSSUK. I am very happy that I am able to hand over this important role to the younger generation and look forward to working with the new president of FOSSUK.

Franz Muheim
President