

Annual General Meeting 2022 of the Swiss Society Bangkok 26 March 2022, Montien Hotel Bangkok Suriwong

Report of the President

1. Introductory Remarks

This March 2022, we are looking back at an extraordinary two years which were dominated by restrictions of movement and activities imposed on all of us, wherever we were, in Thailand or abroad, taking measures to stay healthy and to contain the SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) pandemic. One year ago, at our AGM 2021, I hoped we were slowly moving towards a more normal time as vaccinations had already been available in many countries. To our disappointment we saw the vaccination campaign delayed in Thailand, and we also had to realize that viruses mutate and new variations with unknown effectiveness appeared.

However, I am now again hopeful for normalization soon because the current Omicron variant appears to be very infectious but significantly weaker – a realistic chance to move towards herd immunity. And although vaccinations started late, a big number of inhabitants of this country are vaccinated by now.

What has changed in the recent months? Everyone became a virologist. We read so much about the pandemic that we either got entirely confused or we became specialists in medical science. At least, that is what we believe we are.

For the present report we understand that not much was possible in terms of activities and events during the past twelve months. Social distancing, to move less and avoid human contact as much as possible – in short: stay home, was respected by many among us, particularly those considered more vulnerable.

2. The Committee and its meetings

The following members were serving in the SSB board during the year 2021 to 2022: Sacha Bürgi (event manager), Pierre Chabloz (link with CH embassy), Thomas Gerber (treasurer), Andreas Mikes (secretary, website, FB), Werner Schächli (registration and events), Josef Schnyder (vice-president and events), Mike Wyler (membership administration) and Christian Brunner (president). Guido Riva left the board on 4.4.2021 and Hop Phan Stierli left on 24.6.2021. Christian Vogel, replaced Simon Dörig as the principal of the RIS Swiss Section and he is also the link of the SSB with the school since last summer.

Throughout 2021 the main topics to discuss in our board meetings were linked with the events planned to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the SSB: the Gala Dinner at the Mandarin Oriental, the party we called the Volksfest, where we wished to attract as many members of the SSB and guests as possible to come together and have fun with games, music and dance, as well as other events, some linked with the Swiss embassy which also celebrated 90 years of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Thailand. And the result of those discussions: most events had to be postponed or canceled.

The first board meeting after the AGM 2021 was held on the 2nd of April 2021. Already the second gathering of the SSB Committee on the 6th of May 2021 had to be done online from our home offices. For the third meeting we came together on 24th of June 2021.

Due to ongoing Covid-19 restrictions during summer, the SSB board met on August 18, 2021, and again on 22nd of September 2021, both times online. On the 3rd of November 2021 the board was able to meet physical. Meeting number 7 on the 10th of January 2022 was an online discussion with the result to postpone, for the third time, the Gala Dinner. And finally, meetings number 8 and 9 in this reporting period took place on the 15th of February 2022 and on the 15th of March 2022 respectively.

End of June 2021, our only female board member, graphic design expert Hop Phan Stierli took her leave, as she returned to Switzerland with her family. She still assisted the board on distance for the layout of the book *“90 Years of SSB”*.

After the summer holidays 2021, Christian Vogel joined the SSB committee. He replaced Simon Dörig as the principal of the RIS Swiss Section and is now the direct link between the SSB and the school.

3. Membership

During the reporting period, more members left the SSB than new members joined. Some among our senior members decided to return to Switzerland for good, probably linked with age and health conditions. Other members moved for job reasons.

The current count is now the following:

- Ordinary members: 209
- Honorary members: 7
- Associate members: 11

In total, the SSB counts 227 members. Out of this total number, 97 are family members and 130 are single members. If we consider that the family members count more than one person, we can state that we have 324 members with approximately 40 children in the SSB.

216 members (209 ordinary and 7 honorary) have the voting right.

Sadly, we mourn the loss of two senior SSB members:

Paul Josef Somm, our most senior Honorary member, succumbed heart failure on the 30th of July 2021 at the hospital in Hua Hin.

Rudolf (Ruedi) Böhler, also a very senior member of the SSB, passed away in hospital in Bangkok on 15 August 2021 after short serious sickness.

Our sincere condolences were extended to both families respectively.

Recently, we were also informed about the passing away of SSB member **Harald Witgreffe** in Hua Hin and of former longtime SSB member **Hans-Peter Tillmann** in Pattaya.

4. Report on the activities of the Swiss Society Bangkok

4.1. Monthly Get-together meetings

The monthly Get-together events suffered greatly during the past year. From 12 gatherings, 6 were canceled, 3 were held without presentations, and only 3 regular monthly meetings with short presentations could take place.

In April and October 2021, some 20 members and friends met in restaurant Chesa, however due to the uncertainty whether the event could take place, no speakers were engaged. Then, throughout the summer months, from May to end of September 2021, all monthly meetings had to be canceled.

103: In November 2021, 22 SSB members enjoyed a presentation by the deputy Head of Mission of the Swiss Embassy, Mr. Conradin Rasi, and Mr. Matteo Fetz, Political and Economic Attaché. Within the broad activities of the embassy in the field of foreign policy, the diplomates concentrated on the topic of human rights, from the definition to the priorities and principles to the implementation in Thailand.

104: The December Get-together, popular because of the Christmas dinner (Fondue Chinoise, Nüsslisalat and Crème Brulée) attracted 25 members and friends. They got the newest information about the Swiss Thai Chamber of Commerce presented by its Executive Director and SSB member, David Stauffacher.

After New Year, we had to cancel the first two Get-together meetings of January (#105) and February 2022 (#106) due to newly imposed restrictions related to the Omicron variant of Covid-19.

107: The first Monthly meeting of 2022 could be organized on 15 March 2022. 27 SSB members and guests listened fascinated to Mr. Michel Baumgartner's exposition on the subject "Living conditions on our planet are changing. Should we rethink our relationship with the Earth?" The participants enjoyed a very stimulating and thoughtful performance in a pleasant atmosphere.

We are especially grateful to all speakers during this period as they have shown enough flexibility when it was not certain whether the event can take place, and we also thank again the Chesa team for hosting us and for sponsoring the meals for the speakers.

4.2. Events

Going through the agenda of 2021 is rather frustrating. On every other page we must read the word CANCELED! And this in the year when the Swiss Society had planned to celebrate its 90th anniversary.

24.03.2021 The **Annual General Meeting 2021**, was held at Hotel Arnoma Grand Bangkok. Present at the meeting were 85 members with voting right, including 9 proxies. Shortly after the AGM, the Thai government issued tough restrictions for all movements and gatherings of even small groups with the objective to limit the spreading of Covid-19.

03.04.2021 **Jass Tournament #1 , 2021/22**
On Saturday, 3rd of April 2021, 16 passionate card players met for the first Jass afternoon in this season followed by a savory dinner at the Brasserie 9. As usual, Stefan Khun was responsible for the technical part of the tournament. After he left early for another event, Josef Schnyder took over. Linus Knobel managed to exploit the "home advantage" and thanks to his flawless drawing of the cards he won the tournament.

- 27.11.2021 **Stamps – 90th Anniversary Friendship Railway**
On Saturday 27th November 2021 (the same day as the Raclette evening), Werner Schächli organized a visit to the stamp exhibition at the Samsen-Nai Philatelic Museum. Five SSB members and two guests participated at this interesting event. On November 11, 2021, Thailand Post and Swiss Post launched the special stamps of the joint special issue to mark the 90th anniversary of bilateral relations between Switzerland and Thailand.
To mark the occasion, Thailand Post issued a special commemorative stamp set titled "The 90th Anniversary Friendship Railway" to reflect the friendship between the two countries, which officially began in 1931. The stamp set includes 2 stamp designs depicting the special express train between Bangkok - Pa Sak Jolasid Dam in Lopburi, known as the "floating train", and the famous two-hour journey on the Lucerne – Interlaken Express; a popular tourist route highlighting Switzerland's turquoise lakes, glacier mountains and pristine waterfalls.
- 27.11.2021 The traditional **Raclette Evening** in the garden of the Swiss ambassador's residence was indeed the first big event we were able to realize in 2021. We were lucky. We chose a beautiful evening in perfect weather conditions for some 120 participants to enjoy the Swiss traditional dish in a very pleasant and relaxed atmosphere.
- 12.12.2021 **Christmas brunch 2021:** Our honorary member, Albin Ruffner was once again "on stage" as Samichlaus in Brasserie 9, where 52 adults and 22 children gathered for an early Christmas celebration. The children were professionally entertained by the RIS Swiss Section, the German-speaking school in Bangkok. As in other years, the buffet offered by the crew of the Brasserie 9 with its new chef Raphael Kinimo was overwhelming.
- 15-17.12.2021 **Excursion to Khao Yai**
The event started on Wednesday, 15th of December 2021 with wine tasting at the Granmonte winery. It continued Thursday, 16th of December, with the participation at the inauguration of the Thai-Swiss Friendship trail at Kao Yai National Park organized by the Swiss embassy with the Thai authorities in honor of the 90 years of bilateral relations between the Kingdom of Thailand and the Swiss Confederation.
22. 01.2022 **Jass Tournament # 2, 2021/22**
As gatherings of small groups were again allowed, the second Jass tournament of the season 2021-22 was organized shortly after New year in the Brasserie 9, followed by a delicious dinner. And once again there were 16 players who hoped that the Jass goddess will bless them with good cards. Emmanuel Darbellay, the newcomer in the SSB who participated for the first time, demonstrated how a "Suisse romand" plays the Jass, he won the tournament convincingly.

With the second Newsletter of 2021 sent out on the 30th of June 2021, we informed

- that the Gala Dinner 90 Years SSB was postponed from 21st of May 2021 to the 29th of October 2021,
- that the 90 Years SSB-Anniversary Party (also called the "Volksfest") was postponed from the 30th October 2021 to the 26th of February 2022,
- that the celebration of the Swiss National Day on the 1st of August 2021 was canceled once again. (Remember that we had to cancel the same event one year earlier already).

In the third 2021 Newsletter sent to all SSB members on 27th of September 2021, we announced

- that the Gala Dinner was further postponed to Friday 28th of January 2022, as it was not possible to have it end of October 2021 as planned,
- that we will try to maintain the other events planned later in the year (e.g. Raclette evening, Christmas brunch, Khao Yai excursion).

In the fourth and last Newsletter in 2021 sent out on 1st of December 2021, we wrote

that we were hopeful to carry out the next planned events, but we had to change the date of the 90-Years Anniversary Party postponed already from October 2021 to end of March 2022. Therefore, we decided to combine it with the AGM 2022.

After New Year, the Thai authorities were alerted by the fast spreading of the Omicron variant of the Covid-19 virus and issued new restrictions concerning gatherings of bigger groups and particularly the government maintained that the hotels were not allowed to serve alcohol in ballroom events.

In an ad-hoc online board meeting of January 10, 2022, it was decided to postpone the Gala Dinner scheduled to take place in Mandarin Oriental on the 28th of January once again. A new date for this charity event could not be indicated yet.

It was understandable that the event managers started to be frustrated by these repeated setbacks.

5. From the Archive of the SSB to the Book

“90 Jahre Swiss Society, 1931 – 2021” (original), 90 Years of Swiss Society, 1931 – 2021” (translation)

For the 90th anniversary a book was written about the history of the Swiss Society Bangkok with material from the SSB archives. The book describes the exciting events of the SSB from the founding years to the present and reports on stirring experiences of Swiss pioneers, of capable businessmen, of old-established Swiss trading companies, but also of adventurers and poachers up to the deserter of the French Foreign Legion from Indochina. The book is livened up with varied interviews and portraits of long-time members of the SSB. The price of the book is THB 500.00. The possible profits from the sale will go to our aid organization "Swiss Support Swiss" to help Swiss people in need in Thailand.

Over 7'000 documents from 1931 to 2021 have been scanned and stored in the Dropbox archive of the SSB. President Reports, Annual General Meeting minutes, partly including financial reports from the beginning in 1931 up to 1959, and from 1990 until 2020 can now be found online, photos from the past years have been filed in the archive gallery. In order to access the archives a member login is required. In case of any problems, the SSB secretary can help: (admin@ssb.or.th) or (secretary@ssb.or.th).

6. Clubdesk, the SSB software, the SSB website, SSB on facebook

SSB is mostly visited on facebook, less on its website. However, please be reminded that there are two areas on the website:

1. A public area to present the society to the outside with lots of information about events.
2. An internal area which can only be viewed by members.

All SSB members have the opportunity to register for the internal area and to create a password.

So far, only some 20% of all members have created an account. For help to get there, please contact admin@ssb.or.th or secretary@ssb.or.th. A [quickguide](#) can be found on the website (www.ssb.or.th).

Members who were not able to join certain events can find reports and pictures about them very easily on the website.

Our secretary, Andreas Mikes, continued to update the website quasi on a daily basis.

7. Conference of the Presidents of Swiss Societies in Thailand

The yearly conference of the Swiss Society presidents was successfully organized by the Swiss Lanna Society (SLS) on 13th November 2021 in Chiang Mai. The active participation of our ambassador, Mrs. Helene Budliger Artieda, and the Consul General, Mr. Pierre Chabloz, gave the meeting additional value and content, particularly in reviewing the involvement and support of all five Swiss Societies in Thailand at the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis.

Our ASO representatives, Mr. Josef Schnyder (Bangkok) and Mr. Adrian Meister (Chiang Mai) gave an update on the current problems currently treated with the authorities in Switzerland: banking, health insurance, e-voting were mentioned as priorities. If the number of Swiss immigrants registered by the Swiss embassy further increases, our ASO delegates will request for the position of third delegate.

The 2022 presidents conference of Swiss Societies will be organized by the Swiss Society Phuket on 18-19 November in Phuket.

8. Special Thanks

We are especially grateful to the following persons:

Swiss ambassador HE Helene Budliger Artieda for her continuous support and sponsorship **and her Staff**, in particular consul **Pierre Chabloz**, the Embassy delegate to the SSB Committee;

Linus Knobel for supporting Raclette, Christmas Brunch, and also for hosting and sponsoring Jass competitions as well as gift vouchers for Get-together speakers;

Thomas Nowak and René Kuhn for hosting Get-together meetings at their restaurant and sponsoring the meals of the speakers;

All Sponsors for donating Tombola prizes;

Some generous members for their financial support;

Stefan Kuhn, who officiates as internal auditor, and is the technical organizer of the Jass competitions and the Pub-tour;

Khun Dhira for doing all the legal work;

Khun Ploenta, for supporting the treasurer;

Albin Ruffner for acting the Samichlaus each year;

John Hauenstein (Paparazzo) for reports and pictures of SSB events.

all speakers of our Get-together meetings;

and finally, all SSB members and friends, who helped over the year with organizing and participating in SSB events.

Christian Brunner
SSB president