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Official Communications

Revision of the Nationality Act

Patience will be rewarded

Children born to Swiss women on or after 1st July 1985 are automatically Swiss nationals. That is the most important innovation in the revision of the Nationality Act which came into force on the same date. For further details, may we refer you to the last issue of the «Review».

In certain circumstances children born to Swiss women before 1st July 1985 can apply to become Swiss. At the moment, therefore, Swiss embassies and consulates are being flooded with applications. It is estimated that, as a result, there will be no fewer than 60 000 to 100 000 new Swiss nationals.

During this period of special work the other tasks of the embassies and consulates, and of the offices in Switzerland occupied with these applications, will not decline, so decisions cannot be expected from one day to the next. You must be prepared to wait **several months**, and in some cases **over a year**. May we therefore ask applicants not to inquire of – or complain to – embassies and consulates or their canton of origin; this will lead to investigations which will only cause further delay.

FDFA
Service of the Swiss abroad

Closing of Consulates

Why these changes?

Understandably, the Swiss communities concerned were not very pleased when, from 1983, the Federal Council began transforming the consulates in Turin, Catania, Florence, Lille, Rotterdam and Antwerp into honorary consulates. One result of these measures was, of course, that the administrative tasks were transferred to other missions. In many cases correspondence has now taken place of personal visits. The consulates were closed in the course of a reduction of our network of consular missions. The purpose of this article is to explain the reasons behind the restructuring process.

Budgetary deficits and personnel freeze

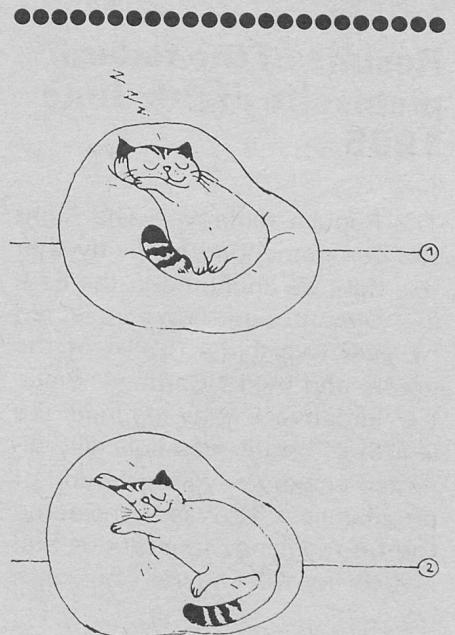
It is well known that the Confederation's accounts have for years shown large deficits. Parliament therefore demanded that economies be made in all branches of the Federal Administration. One of the measures taken is the personnel freeze, which has been in force for 10 years and will continue to be strictly applied.

The Department of Foreign Affairs has of course been affected too by these measures. Its tasks, however, have increased rather than decreased. Because of reduced budgets and the personnel freeze it had no choice but to rationalize its work constantly and – within the limits imposed by law – to simplify its administrative procedures. But these measures

were not sufficient to achieve the required economy targets. It has therefore been impossible to avoid cuts in the infrastructure of our highly decentralized Department. The Finance Committees of the National Council and the Council of States strongly support these efforts.

New techniques – «confidential persons»

Things have been made easier by modern means of communication, which enable administrative affairs affecting our compatriots to be dealt with at ever greater distances. The age of the jet aircraft and electronic data transmission makes no concessions to traditional structures, especially in highly developed countries. The system of informa-



tion for Swiss abroad has now got into its stride and helps to ensure that our fellow countrymen are kept informed of Swiss affairs even without the physical presence of a Swiss embassy or consulate. Special attention is, of course, given to those compatriots abroad – established or in transit – who for any reason are in difficulties and need the quick advice and help of an official mission. For these cases we have endeavoured to find someone in the Swiss community concerned who would take on the office of Honorary Consul and who, thanks to his/her local knowledge, would be able to act swiftly and effectively. Needless to say, however, we cannot also burden these non-professional consuls with administrative tasks such as the issuing of passports and legalizations.

New posts as well

However, restructuring does not only mean reduction. In a dynamic society the foreign ministry, too, is obliged constantly to adapt its infrastructure to change if the

protection of the country's interests so demands. Thus, we have recently opened a Consulate General in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia). In the United States our representation network has been expanded by the opening of a Consulate General in Houston, and our consular mission in New Orleans will shortly be moved to Atlanta.

What will the future bring?

We shall naturally endeavour, as far as our limited scope will allow, to maintain a network of representation that will correspond to the needs of those concerned (Swiss abroad, export trade etc.). However, it would be as wrong to retain antiquated structures out of respect for tradition as to forgo the necessary new ones out of change. But in all our restructuring plans our compatriots' interests will be fully considered during the decision-making process. Solutions which would involve unacceptable hardship for our fellow countrymen will not be entertained.

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs/General Secretariat

Results of the federal plebiscite of 9th June 1985

The Popular Initiative «The Right to Life» demanded explicitly that this right be anchored in the Federal Constitution. It was rejected by over two thirds (69%) of the voters and by 19 Cantons. Since the Initiative clearly defined the length of life, it was specially directed against any interruption of pregnancies. It was considered too far-reaching, superfluous and unclear by the Federal Council, a

majority of Councillors and all governmental parties, except the Christian People's Party.

In the three finance proposals, the object was to improve the federal financial position permanently by cancelling the Cantons shares of the net result of the stamp duties, by a new allocation of the net profit of the Alcohol Administration as well as the cancellation of the self-provisioning with bread cereals. All three proposals were accepted. Voting participation was 31%.

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Service for the Swiss abroad

Supplementary Institution

2nd Pillar: Attention!

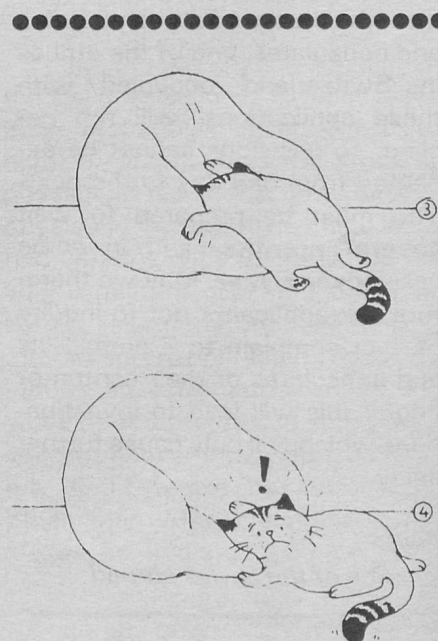
We kindly ask you to forward to the supplementary institution (addresses published in the last issue of the review under official communications) only inquiries concerning directly the article in question. The supplementary institution **is not in a position** to answer questions regarding Old Age (OAI) and Survivors', unemployment, health and accident insurance, military or citizenship matters etc. We also ask those persons to abstain from forwarding questions who are not members of the voluntary OAI, do not exercise a profession (housewives) or have already reached the age-limit for the OAI.

Thank you for your comprehension.

FDFA/Service of the Swiss abroad

Are you 50 this year?

You can join the voluntary AVS/AI not later than one year after your 50th birthday. This is **your last chance!** For further information please write to your Swiss representation.



No voting by mail

Political rights of the Swiss abroad: current regulations remain in force

At the beginning of June the Federal Council took note of the results of the consultation procedure concerning the exercise of the political rights of the Swiss abroad and observed that opinions differed widely on the question of granting vote by correspondence to the Swiss abroad. Twelve cantons, five political parties, four umbrella associations and three other interested organizations opposed the proposed changes, while 14 cantons, two parties, three umbrella associations and 21 private organizations were in favour.

The reasons invoked against this liberalization included, first and foremost, the erosion of the domicile principle and the absence of a direct interest. It was argued that only those who would be directly affected by the outcome should take part in elections and other ballots. The absence of en-

thusiasm on the part of the Swiss abroad and their lack of information were referred to repeatedly.

In these circumstances, the Federal Council resolved to refrain from drafting a Message supporting a revision of the legislation on the political rights of the Swiss abroad. The latter will therefore still only be able to vote in federal elections and other federal ballots if they are in Switzerland at the time. They have been able to do that since 1st January 1977, when the Federal Act on the Political Rights of the Swiss abroad came into force.

Attention: Swiss abroad who wish to exercise their political rights must apply in good time to the Swiss embassy or consulate with which they are registered; they will then be eligible to vote in all future ballots.

FDFA

Service of the Swiss abroad

minimum contribution period of one year, an absolute condition which must be fulfilled by the woman herself before an ordinary pension can be paid.

This especially concerns women who reach pensionable age before their husbands and who may be entitled to an ordinary basic old-age pension. Incidentally, late and retroactive entry has no bearing on the actual amount of the pension.

*FDI/Federal Office for
Social Insurance*

Federal Ballots

1st December 1985

Popular initiative on the abolition of vivisection.

16th March 1986

Switzerland's accession to the UN.

We shall return to this important topic in the December issue.

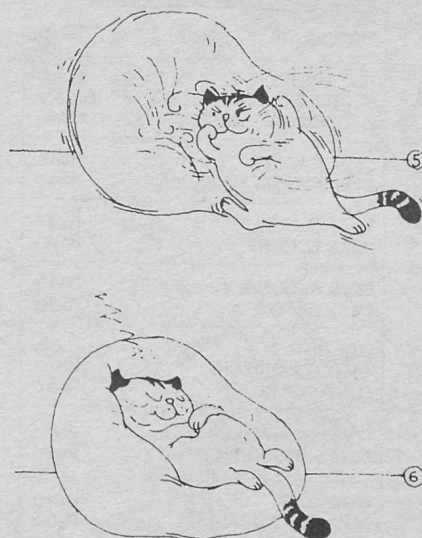
Old Age and Survivors' Insurance/Disability Insurance (OAI/DI)

Wives of men compulsorily insured abroad Special time-limit for voluntary insurance

In 1984 and 1985 Swiss women who are or have been abroad with compulsorily insured husbands have been granted an **exceptional opportunity, with a time-limit, to join the voluntary OAI/DI**. This opportunity enables those women to insure themselves **belatedly and with retroactive effect**, so that the years they have spent abroad are included in their determining contribution period when their OAI/DI pensions are calculated. This would not be possible if they did not join the insurance scheme.

Married and divorced women who still wish to take advantage of this opportunity to join must apply **by 31st December 1985 at the latest. This time-limit can in no circumstances be extended**. The relevant information leaflet and application form (order number 318.119.031) can be obtained free of charge from any Swiss embassy or consulate.

It should also be noted that late entry does not of itself entitle Swiss women to a pension in all cases; the law provides that the right to a pension is subject to a



The drawings are extracted from the book «herzlich Jakob» published by Benteli, Berne, on the occasion of the 10th birthday of this kitten, famous all over the world.