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Imagopress

The primary task of the army remains the defence of the nation.

New look for the Swiss army

On 18 May 2003 Swiss voters approved a sweeping restructuring of the Swiss armed forces. The army reform has been in force since 1 January.

The Swiss constitution and military law define the tasks of the Swiss army in the following terms: prevention of war and the keeping of the peace, defence and protection of the population, support for civil authorities in the prevention of threats, and other tasks (for example contributions to the international promotion of peace and international crisis management). Under the army reform (Army XXI) which has been in force since 1 January 2004, the structures and service conditions of the Army 95 are being adjusted and modernised. The primary task of the army is still the defence of the country against military threats.

What's new?

– The new Army XXI remains a militia army and consists of 120,000 active servicemen (in units), 20,000 recruits and 80,000 reserves, i.e. a nominal

total of 220,000 (as opposed to 350,000 previously).

- Whereas soldiers and non-commissioned officers were discharged at the age of 42, the minimum discharge age has been lowered to 30 and the maximum to 34.
- The number of days in service has been reduced for almost all ranks.
- As before, young Swiss must attend recruit school (RS) at the age of 20: However, this basic military training now lasts 21 or 18 weeks depending on the branch and function. Following RS, soldiers must attend six or seven 19-day refresher courses and are then assigned to the reserves.
- Under the new reform, up to 15 percent of conscripts in any annual contingent can complete their entire military service in a single period of 300 days (block service).

- The new army now consists only of units, battalions/departments, and brigades. The regiment, division and army corps levels have been disbanded.
- The concept of phased readiness has been adopted. The army no longer needs to provide all services within the same period and keep all units in a state of readiness. Professional units, regular soldiers and soldiers on a fixed-term engagement are on permanent deployment. If necessary, currently serving recruits and refresher course units or reserve troops will be called up.
- Recruitment lasts up to three days and is now carried out at six permanent recruiting centres in Windisch, Rüti (ZH), Mels, Nottwil (branch in Monte Ceneri), Sumiswald and Lausanne.
- Military service remains a voluntary option for women. If they are accepted into the army, they

have equal opportunities with men and can perform the same functions.

- As a rule, a soldier completes 262 days in service, from recruitment to release from military service obligation.
- The transition from Army 95 to Army XXI began in 2003 and is scheduled for completion in the course of 2005.

Important information for Swiss Abroad

If you remain abroad for longer than twelve months and have de-registered from your community of residence, you must apply for military exemption while abroad. The forms are available from the district command centre or head of section. Exemption from military service while abroad is only granted if all the military obligations incumbent on you up to the date of departure have been fulfilled.

If you remain abroad for less than twelve months or have not de-registered from your community, you do not need to apply for exemption. However, you must provide your head of section with a

point of contact (forwarding address or a contact person) and, if necessary, submit an application to postpone service or for dispensation from shooting practice duty.

The change in military control practices which is scheduled to come into force in mid-2004 will result in the abolition of the obligation to report for military duty when abroad. If you have been granted exemption from military service while abroad, you remain on the military register of the section registrar in your last place of residence in Switzerland. You must designate a person in Switzerland to receive your papers and advise the section head accordingly. The military service booklet is kept by the district command centre which has granted exemption.

Swiss Abroad who wish to volunteer for RS must report to the relevant Swiss representation. The military service booklet is issued by the Swiss authorities. The basic prerequisite is the ability to speak one of Switzerland's national lan-

guages. In addition, Swiss Abroad must not also be citizens of their country of residence.

Your national service obligation becomes unconditionally applicable again on your return to Switzerland. Exceptions to this rule are persons who are eligible for military service but have lived abroad for more than six years and are no longer required by the army. Persons in this category can apply for re-assignment; otherwise they are released from their military service obligation and must pay national service exemption tax.

Swiss Abroad who return to Switzerland for a stay of more than three months must report to their head of section within 14 days of returning. They will be recruited by the end of the calendar year in which they complete their 25th year. Those who have already gone through the recruitment process will be called up to RS by the end of the calendar year in which they complete their 26th year. Otherwise they are released from their military obligation and must pay national service exemption tax.

Persons staying in Switzerland for a short time (staying in Switzerland for less than three months following an uninterrupted twelve-month stay abroad) are released from the obligation to report for military service.

Initiatives

No new initiatives have been submitted since the last issue. Signature forms for pending initiatives can be downloaded from <http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vis10.html>

BDK

How to sign an initiative

Initiative committees and the Federal Chancellery are facilitating the signing of initiatives by providing signature lists in electronic format. Signature forms are now available for downloading from www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vis10.html.

You can only sign a people's initiative if you are entitled to vote. Enter your political community and the corresponding canton on the printed signature list. Enter your details in the signature list manually and legibly, and sign it personally. Give your official address abroad as the place of residence.

Attention: Only people from the same constituency can sign the same signature form. If a signature form contains signatures by people from other constituencies, it is declared invalid.

Send the signed form to the initiative committee.

For more information on political rights in the Confederation, log onto <http://www.bk.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/index.html>.

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Dual citizens


Switzerland has inter-state agreements with various countries (Austria, France, Colombia, Argentina, USA), and is in the process of preparing agreements with Germany and Italy. Under the terms of these agreements, the parties undertake to recognise the national service performed in each others' country as well as alternative civil services (as substitutes for military service) and charges levied on persons in return for exemption. In Switzerland, these terms grant affected persons release from national service duty and from the obligation to pay national service exemption tax. Only the obligation to report for military service remains in force.

Dual citizens whose second domicile country has no agreement with Switzerland and who are in Switzerland for reasons of

employment or studying are unconditionally obliged to do national service unless they have already done national or civil service in their other domicile country.

We recommend that you contact the responsible military authority abroad to determine whether your forthcoming or completed national service in Switzerland is recognised.

Service for the Swiss Abroad/FDFA

Gabriela Brodbeck 

Translated from German

INTERNET

www.vbs-ddps.ch
www.estv.admin.ch
(national service exemption tax)

New residency regulations in France

Since the end of November 2003 France has introduced new immigration and residency regulations. Swiss citizens benefit from the changes in that they no longer require a residency permit (carte de séjour) to justify their place of residence in France.

For more information, contact the Swiss representations in France or log onto the home page of the Federal Office for Immigration, Integration and Emigration at www.swissemigration.ch

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Increased cost of naturalisation and visas

Since 1 January 2004 the federal fees for renaturalisation and facilitated naturalisation have been increased by CHF 30 to CHF 250. Cantonal fees for issuing and procuring marital status papers have been raised as well, to CHF 55.

Visa charges have also been adjusted. Visas issued by a Swiss diplomatic or consular representa-

tion now cost CHF 55 instead of CHF 40. This increase brings Swiss visa charges into line with EU visa charges and simultaneously introduces the EU principle of charging applicants a fee even if their visa application is rejected. For additional information, contact your Swiss representation.

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