

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 33 (2006)
Heft: 3

Rubrik: Official DFA information

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Staff changes

The following staff changes took place in spring at the Service for the Swiss Abroad (Auslandschweizerdienst, ASD) of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). At the end of May 2006, Ambassador Markus Börlin succeeded Ambassador Peter Sutter, who now represents the interests of the Confederation in the Philippines. Ambassador Börlin is head of Political Division VI (PD VI), which looks after the concerns of Swiss abroad, and the ASD, which is attached to PD VI.



Markus Börlin, born in Basle in 1960, is a citizen of Bubendorf / BL. He graduated from Basle University with a degree in law (lic.iur.). After working as a court registrar at the Liestal administrative and insurance court and the district court in Arlesheim, and as an assistant for penal law at Basle University's Faculty of Law, he joined the DFA in 1990 and served as an intern in Berne and Ottawa. From 1992 he worked as a diplomatic officer at the Section for International Cultural and UNESCO Affairs, part of the former Directorate for International Organisations. In 1995 he was assigned to Political Division II, where he was responsible for Latin America. In 1997 he was transferred to Nairobi as First Secretary to the Head of Mission, where

he was promoted to Counsellor in 1999. In mid-2000 he became Head of the Special Crisis Unit in Berne (with the title of Minister) and Deputy Head of Political Division VI. Since mid-2004 Markus Börlin has been Counsellor and First Secretary to the Head of Mission in Stockholm.

Voluntary AHV/IV in EU/EFTA countries

As a result of the revision of the voluntary old age, survivors and disability insurance scheme (AHV/IV), Swiss nationals resident in EU and EFTA member states can no longer join the voluntary AHV/IV scheme.

The agreement on free movement of persons between Switzerland and EU/EFTA states has been in force since 1 June 2002. Among other things, the agreement governs the coordination of social security in member states. In 2001, ahead of the coming into force of this agreement, the Swiss parliament voted to amend the provisions governing voluntary AHV/IV contributions. This means that since 1 April 2001 Swiss nationals resident in an EU member state and, since 1 June 2002, those resident in an EFTA state, no longer have the option of joining the AHV/IV scheme on a voluntary basis.

Insured persons resident in the EU countries

Insured persons who reached the age of 50 before 1 April 2001 can still be insured under the voluntary AHV/IV scheme until they reach the statutory retirement age. In Switzerland the statutory retirement age is 64 for women and 65 for men.

From 1 April 2007, insured persons born on or after 1 April 1951 can no longer pay contributions to the voluntary AHV/IV. This regulation applies to in-

sured persons resident in the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

Insured persons resident in EFTA countries

Persons resident in Norway, Iceland or the Principality of Liechtenstein who were born on or after 1 June 1952, can remain insured under the voluntary AHV/IV scheme only until 31 May 2008. Insured persons who reached the age of 50 before 1 June 2002 can remain insured until they reach the statutory retirement age.

New EU member states

On 25 September 2005, the Swiss electorate voted in favour of the extension of the agreement on free movement of persons. The extension protocol to the agreement between Switzerland and the EU came into force on 1 April 2006.

The extension of the agreement to include the ten new EU member states also means that insured persons resident in these countries can no longer contribute to the voluntary AHV/IV scheme. The new EU countries are as follows: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia. Persons who were insured in these countries under the voluntary AHV/IV scheme until the protocol came into force, can remain insured for another six consecutive years (maximum), i.e. until no later than 31 March 2012. Persons who had reached the age of 50 by the date on which the protocol came into force (i.e. 1 April 2006) can remain insured under the voluntary AHV/IV scheme until they reach the statutory retirement age.

Under the terms of the agreement on free movement of persons, those who were insured in two or more EU/EFTA states

and reach retirement age or become disabled, receive a partial pension from each involved state. Due to this so-called pro rata system, every EU/EFTA state guarantees a share of the pension indexed to the period during which the insured person has been resident in the country and paying contributions, provided contributions have been paid for at least one year to the relevant national social security scheme. Entitlement to a Swiss AHV/IV pension is also calculated according to this system, and paid to Swiss nationals as well as EU and EFTA citizens abroad if they have been paying contributions for the minimum period.

Insured persons are free to supplement their state retirement pension with private insurance. In this context we also refer you to Soliswiss, the Solidarity Fund for Swiss Nationals Abroad, which offers a range of retirement products for Swiss nationals living abroad.

Persons residing or taking up residence outside the EU/EFTA area can continue to contribute voluntarily to the Swiss AHV/IV scheme if they were insured with the AHV/IV for an uninterrupted period of at least five years immediately prior to leaving Switzerland.

*Additional information:
www.avs-ai-international.ch
www.soliswiss.ch*

New telephone prefix for the Zurich region

From the end of March 2007, the prefix 01 will be replaced by 044 for all telephone numbers in the Zurich region. The rest of the telephone number remains unchanged. If you are calling from abroad, you must dial +41 44 instead of +41 1.

The prefix 044 can be used as of now. Until March 2007, numbers beginning with 044 can still be dialled using either prefix 044 or 01. After this date, num-

bers with prefix 01 will no longer be valid. Anyone who dials a number with prefix 01 will hear a recorded message.

For more information, contact:

www.bakom.admin.ch
(Topics – Telecommunication)

"The Swiss Confederation – a brief guide 2006"

The brochure entitled "The Swiss Confederation – a brief guide 2006" was published in March 2006 in the four national languages as well as in English. The publication, issued by the Federal Chancellery, is available free of charge.

This year's brochure covers 84 pages. As usual, it begins with an interview with the Federal President of Switzerland. This year Moritz Leuenberger was interviewed by Konrad Mrusek, a correspondent with the "Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung".

tion on when these parliamentarians were elected and the committees on which they sit. The brochure also explains in simple terms how new laws are created, and describes the tasks of the Federal Council, departments and federal offices, parliamentary services, the Federal Chancellery, Federal Court and Insurance Court.

Once more the information is enhanced with the aid of photos, diagrams and organisational charts. The photographs for this year's edition were taken by Zurich photographer Stefan Walter.

The brochure is available free of charge from:
Federal Office for Construction and Logistics (BBL), Publications, CH-3050 Berne
Fax: +41 031 325 50 58
Internet: www.bbl.admin.ch/bundespulikationen



The natural course of the river Töss, downstream from Embrach (ZH).

ter levels artificially caused by hydroelectric plant operators, since this damages the ecosystem of flowing waters (bed erosion through swell and sink effects).

The cantons would be responsible for restoration measures and the related financing, and would set up renaturation funds. If the resultant costs cannot be charged to the polluters, the measures would be financed from these funds.

The initiative also calls for an extension of the right to appeal of directly affected organisations or nation-wide fishing, nature conservation and environmental organisations. Such organisations would be able to petition the Confederation and cantons to implement water renaturation projects.

You still have until 4 July 2006 to sign this initiative.

CURRENT POPULAR INITIATIVES

The following initiative has been launched since the last issue:

- "For a solidarity tax (against a two-tier society"); until 28 September 2007

You can download signature forms for current initiatives from www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vivis10.html.

VOTING:

Federal Referendum:

24 September 2006

- People's initiative of 9 October 2002: "National bank profits for the AHV"
- Federal law of 16 December 2005 on foreigners (provided the request for a referendum is successful)
- Amendment of 16 December 2005 to the asylum law (provided the request for a referendum is successful)

Date of forthcoming referendum in 2006: 26 November

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