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The network of Swiss foreign missions

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) has issued the following information about the strategy for developing the network of Swiss foreign representations and about ongoing restructuring.

General information and strategy

In accordance with the principle of universality, Switzerland has relations with every country in the world through its foreign policy. This network can be described as close-knit when compared to those of other countries. In order to safeguard its interests abroad, Switzerland maintains a

large, geographically widespread network of representations, currently comprising more than 150 missions (diplomatic and consular services) as well as cooperation offices and honorary consulates (see table in next column). The principle of universality is reflected in the furthering of our interests worldwide, our independence and our policy of neutrality. This principle will also remain inviolable in the future. If gaps occur, it is up to us to fill them. Although we could theoretically restrict our network to a handful of large representations, this would neither further our country's interests nor satisfy the needs of expatriate Swiss citizens, who rely on our services.

The foreign network fulfils a central role in

defending Swiss interests. It is a proven tool and satisfies many of the needs of Swiss foreign policy. It is constantly being evaluated and where necessary adapted in line with developments in our priorities. In response to the strict austerity measures adopted by the Swiss Parliament in recent years, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs felt obliged to restructure its network of foreign representations while continuing to further our country's high-priority interests.

In 2008, the FDFA plans to close the consulates general in Osaka and Bordeaux, and open a new embassy in the Azerbaijani capital Baku.

The work previously undertaken at the consulates now closed will have to be handled by other missions in the relevant country.

In parallel to this, the FDFA has appointed honorary consuls whose key task is to safeguard Swiss interests in their particular region and maintain contact between the Swiss authorities and the local Swiss community through its associations.

In 2006, the FDFA also decided to open two new consulates general, one in St. Petersburg and the other in Guangzhou (China), on account of the high demand for consular services in these two regions.

THE NETWORK OF SWISS FOREIGN REPRESENTATIONS

AS AT 1.10.2007

Embassies	96
Missions	12
Consulates	37
Miscellaneous offices	6
Honorary consulates	176
Cooperation offices	42

Recent restructuring

Since the early 1990s, 22 missions (six embassies and 16 consulates general) have had to close. Over the same period, 20 new missions have been opened, primarily embassies, most of them in Europe, as a result of the expansion of the European Union and the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia.

Due to the cost-cutting measures approved by Parliament in 2004, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs decided to close nine consulates general from 2005 onwards. This has been partly completed, with the offices in Amsterdam, Manchester, Las Palmas, Dresden, Melbourne and Houston closing in 2006 and the representation in Naples closing this year.

The future

In the future we expect the focus of the network of Swiss foreign representations to shift from Europe to areas outside Europe. At present, 41 percent of Swiss representations and 43 percent of our "mobile" staff are located within Europe.

This concentration may appear natural at first sight given Switzerland's close political and economic ties with its fellow European nations, but it does not reflect the reality on the ground. At the political level, bilateral agreements are increasingly being negotiated within the framework of the European institutions in Brussels rather than directly with individual countries, as was previously the case. Indeed our representations play a less important role for Swiss citizens resident in Europe and North America than for

Hong Kong, Helsinki oder Havanna...?

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NOTICE FROM THE SWISS COMPENSATION OFFICE TO VOLUNTARILY INSURED PERSONS

As announced in issue 6/05 of the Swiss Review, the Swiss Compensation Office has closed its foreign Old-age, Survivors' and Disability Insurance (AHV/IV) offices. We have now concentrated all our activities in Geneva. All insured persons have already been notified personally in writing about the change. All the insurance files are now stored in Geneva.

After the reform of the voluntary AHV/IV scheme in January 2001, which led to a significant fall in the number of insured persons, this reorganisation was deemed inevitable.

The changes do not affect people who already receive an AHV or IV pension.

The Swiss Compensation Office and the IV office for insured persons residing outside Switzerland, both of which are divisions of the Central Compensation Office, are jointly responsible for the administration of the voluntary AHV/IV scheme.

For further information concerning *contributions*, please contact: Zentrale Ausgleichsstelle ZAS, Schweizerische Ausgleichskasse SAK, Freiwillige Versicherung, Beitraege, Avenue Edmond-Vaucher 18, Case postale 3100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Tel. +41 22 795 9111, Fax +41 22 795 1501, csc-af@zas.admin.ch, www.avs-ai-international.ch

For further information concerning *old age pension and survivors' (AHV) benefits*, please contact: Zentrale Ausgleichsstelle ZAS, Schweizerische Ausgleichskasse SAK, Freiwillige Versicherung, Leistungen, Avenue Edmond-Vaucher 18, Case postale 3100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Tel. +41 22 795 9111, Fax +41 22 795 9703, sedmaster@zas.admin.ch, www.avs-ai-international.ch

For further information concerning *disability (IV) benefits*, please contact: Zentrale Ausgleichsstelle ZAS, IV-Leistungen fuer Auslandschweizer, Avenue Edmond-Vaucher 18, Case postale 3100, CH-1211 Geneva 2, Tel. +41 22 795 9111, Fax +41 22 795 9950, OAI@zas.admin.ch, www.avs-ai-international.ch

SWISS COMPENSATION OFFICE – VOLUNTARY INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS
Translated from French

those living elsewhere. The reason for this is that bureaucratic procedures in Europe and North America are simpler to grasp since the legal norms are comparable to those in Switzerland. As such, Swiss citizens know what to do and can therefore do without our support.

Furthermore, migration from these regions does not pose any problems in terms of visa applications or the repatriation of failed asylum seekers, matters regularly faced by representations in other countries. The situation is fundamentally different in Asia, the Middle East,

Africa and Latin America, which is why the representations in these regions are fulfilling an increasingly important role. It is therefore inevitable that our human and financial resources will be redistributed to reduce the concentration of representations in Europe and North America for the benefit of all other regions.

The current restructuring and cost-cutting measures within the FDFA will probably lead to further closures of representations and consultates general.

FDFA DIRECTORATE
FOR MANAGEMENT
Translated from French

Against fat-cat payouts

The politically independent committee "Federal Popular Initiative Against Fat-cat Payouts" launched the federal initiative "against fat-cat payouts" in October 2006 (see Swiss Review 1/07). The committee wants to increase the co-determination rights of shareholders. The new ruling would only affect Swiss public limited companies listed in Switzerland or abroad.

In recent years, the directors and managers of Swiss publicly listed firms have received rewards worth millions. This initiative aims to restrict such payouts by giving shareholders a greater say in such matters. The initiators also believe that the draft amendment to the Swiss joint-stock legislation does not go far enough.

The initiative calls for a change to Article 95 of the Swiss Federal Constitution. A new Paragraph 3 of this article would oblige all companies to vote on all payments to their management,

both monetary and in kind, at their annual general meeting. Shareholders would also decide on the membership of the board of directors, remuneration committee and advisory board every year. Departing managers would not be given golden handshakes anymore, and advance payments and bonuses for corporate mergers and acquisitions would also be forbidden. Because shareholders are often spread out around the world, the initiative wants to strengthen their decision-making powers by introducing electronic remote voting via SMS or over the Internet.

In addition to amending the Federal Constitution, the initiative also wants the Provisional Regulations changed. A new clause 8 of Article 197 of these regulations would oblige the Government to issue a decree enforcing the measures if the new constitutional amendment does come into effect within a year of being approved by the two chambers of Parliament.

The initiative can be signed until 1 May 2008.

Translated from German

POPULAR INITIATIVES

The following initiatives have been launched since the last issue:

- "For protection against gun-related violence" (until 4 March 2009)
- "Home ownership through building society savings" (until 7 February 2009)
- "Secure housing in old age" (until 7 February 2009)
- "For freedom of expression – No to censorship!" (until 7 February 2009)

Signature forms for current initiatives can be downloaded from the Federal Chancellery site:

www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vis_1_3_1_1.html

Translated from German

RESPONSIBLE FOR THE OFFICIAL FDFA INFORMATION PAGES:

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