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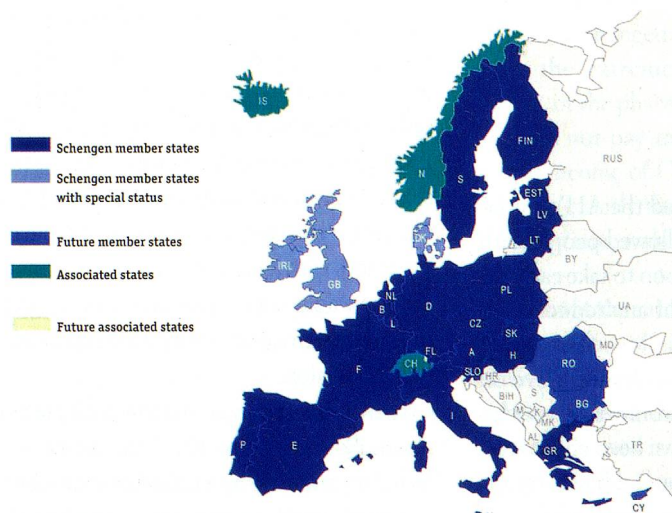
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Switzerland's association with Schengen: participation in common visa policy

The Swiss people voted in favour of the Schengen/Dublin Association Agreements on 5 June 2005. Cooperation between Switzerland and the EU within the framework of the Schengen and Dublin agreements is set to begin in December 2008.



What is Schengen all about?

The basic aim is to facilitate travel within the Schengen area (see map) without reducing security. Identity checks between the Schengen states have therefore been withdrawn. The Swiss border represents an exceptional case as customs controls are still carried out (Switzerland is not a member of the EU Customs Union). However, people can still be checked at these customs controls for security reasons and in the event of police suspicion. At the same time, security is being increased through a series of measures: controls at Schengen's external borders are being tightened and cross-border cooperation between police and judicial authorities is being stepped up.

When will Switzerland start operational Schengen cooperation and introduce the Schengen visa?

Switzerland is aiming to begin operational Schengen cooperation before the end of 2008. However, the exact start date will depend on the result of an evaluation process currently being carried out; the Council of the European Union is expected to make a decision at the end of November.

What is a Schengen visa?

The Schengen visa is a standard entry document which covers entry into the entire Schengen area (with the exception of the United Kingdom and Ireland, see map). Anyone wanting to combine their visit to Switzerland with a trip to nearby EU countries will, in future, only need to obtain one visa, as opposed to the current practice of acquiring both a Schengen visa and a Swiss visa.

Will the Swiss visa be completely replaced by the Schengen visa?

Yes, the Schengen visa (valid for a maximum of three months per six-month period from the date of initial entry) will replace the Swiss visa for short-term visits.

What is a Schengen visa for?

The Schengen visa only governs short-term stays of a maximum of three months within a six-month period. For longer stays in a Schengen member state, it is essential to apply for a visa applicable in the respective member state under the national law of that state.

Regulations on taking up employment also continue to be governed by national law. The corresponding Swiss authorisation procedures will therefore be retained in respect of Schengen. However, a Schengen visa will always be issued for visits of less than three months irrespective of the purpose of the trip and the authorisation procedure concerned.

How do you apply for a Schengen visa?

The procedure at Swiss representations abroad will essentially remain the same for applicants following the introduction of the Schengen visa. The new application forms and guidelines will be available from the Swiss representations and on their websites in due course: www.eda.admin.ch (Representations)

However, it should be noted that the Schengen visa should always be applied for from the member state that is the main travel destination. Furthermore, travel health insurance valid in all Schengen states is also required (minimum cover EUR 30,000). Schengen visa charges are also regulated uniformly and amount to EUR 60 in normal cases.

Further information on the introduction of Schengen in Switzerland can be found on the following websites: www.bfm.admin.ch and www.europa.admin.ch. Reto Läderach, DFA, Consular Affairs

Switzerland and the EU are more than just neighbours

Switzerland and the EU have never had closer ties than at present. This is highlighted by the high level of trade between the two, totalling more than CHF 1 billion every day. It is also exemplified by the many personal relationships between the citizens of Switzerland and the EU. More than 400,000 Swiss people today live in the EU, while around 1 million EU citizens live in Switzerland. The foundation for this close economic relationship is the bilateral agreement on the free movement of persons. On 8 February 2009, the Swiss people will vote in a referendum on the continuation of the agreement and its extension to Bulgaria and Romania.

The number of Swiss citizens living abroad in the EU has increased by around 70,000 over the past ten years. This underlines the growing importance for lots of Swiss people of spending a part of their lives in another European country. Various reasons explain this trend. Some accompany their spouses abroad following a change of job, while others leave to pursue their own career goals. Some want to spend time abroad to learn a foreign language, while others wish to spend their retirement by the sea.

In all of these cases, Swiss citizens have the right to live and work in the EU. The same, of course, applies to EU citizens in Switzerland. The basis for this is provided by the bilateral agree-



ment between Switzerland and the EU on the free movement of persons. As well as equal access to the labour and housing markets, the agreement also covers practical issues of moving abroad, such as the relocation of families, coordination between social insurance schemes and recognition of professional qualifications.

TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS FOR SWISS CITIZENS IN EU COUNTRIES

The free movement of persons is being introduced gradually. This means that certain restrictions currently apply for a transitional period with regard to the opening up of the employment markets.

- There are essentially no longer any special provisions for Swiss citizens in the EU (excluding Bulgaria and Romania). Some countries that joined the EU in 2004 (EU-10) are exceptions to this. These apply transitional provisions for Swiss citizens with regard to the acquisition of property and second homes. Before moving to a country in the EU-10, we recommend that information be obtained on the relevant provisions from the local Swiss embassy.

- The free movement of persons does not yet apply to Bulgaria and Romania.

Referendum on the free movement of persons

The free movement of persons was introduced for an initial period of seven years. Switzerland must now notify the EU whether it wants to continue with the free movement of persons after 2009 on a permanent basis. The agreement is also to be extended to the EU countries Bulgaria and Romania. The Swiss people will decide on the continuation and extension of the agreement at a referendum on 8 February 2009. The free movement of persons is part of the seven agreements of Bilaterals I. These are legally interconnected. A rejection of the free movement of persons would result in the automatic loss of all Bilaterals I (so-called guillotine clause).

The free movement of persons has become a crucial factor for the Swiss economy because Switzerland is reliant on foreign workers. One in four employees is of foreign nationality. There is also a lack of highly skilled and specialist workers. Access to a Europe-wide pool of labour currently helps to reduce gaps in the labour market, while Switzerland remains an attractive location for business and the trend to relocate production processes abroad is slowed. This is helping to secure employment and prosperity in Switzerland. 150,000 new jobs were created in 2006 and 2007.

The Bilaterals I are extremely important for Switzerland economically. They provide the Swiss export industry with extensive, equal access to the Single European Market. Any reduction in access to this market would be extremely damaging to the competitiveness of companies in Switzerland. The EU is Switzerland's most important trading partner by some distance. 60% of exports are destined for the EU. Likewise, Switzerland is the second most important sales market for the EU, even ahead of giants like Russia and China. We earn one franc in three from trade with the EU. Losing the Bilaterals I would undermine Switzerland as a business location. Stable framework conditions are particularly important in times of economic uncertainty.

A "No" vote would jeopardise cooperation with the EU on European policy, which has been developed and continually extended over decades. Switzerland's approach to European policy has proven successful to date. It combines competitiveness, independence, openness and joint responsibility in Europe to create a genuinely Swiss policy on Europe, the policy of the bilateral approach.

More information at www.personenfreizuegigkeit.admin.ch

(German, French, Italian)

Ambassador Urs Bucher, Head of the DFA/DEA Integration Office

Information on popular initiatives

Until now we have listed newly submitted initiatives with the signature deadline, and then presented them in more detail at a later stage. Despite limited available space, we have endeavoured to provide you with objective information on all popular initiatives. However, the number of popular initiatives submitted each year varies considerably. And popular initiatives are also often submitted as soon as the required number of signatures has been reached, in some cases several months before the date announced. It has therefore not been possible in some cases for us to inform you about initiatives that are at the signing stage, which has led to complaints. To ensure equal treatment of all initiatives, in future we will only list newly submitted popular initiatives with the name of the initiative committee, a link to the initiative committee's website and the expiry of the signature deadline.

Increase the rights of the people in foreign policy

The Movement for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland (AUNS) submitted the federal popular initiative "Increase the rights of the people in foreign policy (state treaties before the people!)" in March 2008.

More information can be found on the website of the initiative committee www.auns.ch. This initiative can be signed until 4 September 2009.

POPULAR INITIATIVES

A list of current initiatives and signature forms can be found at www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vis_1_3_1_1.html.

Please complete, sign and return the forms directly to the initiative committee. This committee is also responsible for certifying your signature.

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