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Four new regional consular centres

As reported in "Swiss Review" last June, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) opened eight Regional Consular Centres (R-CC) in 2011 in Bucharest, The Hague, Pristina, Pretoria, Riga, Santo Domingo, Stockholm and Vienna. Owing to highly promising experiences there, the FDFA decided to establish a further four Regional Consular Centres in spring 2012:

- Iberian Peninsula: Madrid for Spain (excluding Barcelona) and Portugal
- London for the United Kingdom and Ireland
- South-East Asia: Bangkok for Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Malaysia
- Buenos Aires for Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay

The consular sections of the following embassies will be closed as a result of the opening of these Regional Consular Centres:

- Lisbon
- Dublin
- Kuala Lumpur
- Montevideo
- Asuncion

The detailed timetable for these operations had not been finalised at the time of going to press. All registered Swiss abroad affected will be informed directly by the representation responsible for them.

The FDFA is aware that the regional service will mean a longer journey and travel time for some of our visitors. We will therefore endeavour to keep the number of people affected to a minimum. In total, the Regional Consular Centres serve around 4% of the Swiss community abroad. Many consular matters can also be dealt with by post or electronically these days. We have found that our fellow citizens have made increasing use of these methods to communicate with our representations in recent years. Attendance in person is only required for a few matters, such as the recording of biometric data for ID documents.

In addition to the Regional Consular Centres, the FDFA is also implementing the following support measures to maintain its high level of public service:

- Setup of a consular helpline in Berne (Phone: +41 800 24-7-365), which will oper-

ate 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year from 1 May 2012 onwards;

- The opportunity to have biometric data for ID documents recorded at any representation, including Regional Consular Centre, or at any cantonal data collection centre in Switzerland (ID documents themselves have to be applied for at the representation responsible);
- Mobile devices may be used, depending on local circumstances, to record biometric data in connection with major events held outside Switzerland for the Swiss abroad (e.g. consular conferences, OSA regional conferences, etc.);
- The FDFA will also take advantage of possible cooperation with other Schengen states regarding visas and will hold regular exchanges with other ministries of foreign affairs that also deal with the issue of regional consular centres;

This restructuring and the related supporting measures will allow us to serve you, the Swiss abroad, as an expert contact at all times.

703,640 Swiss citizens live abroad

The latest statistics on the Swiss abroad show that the number of Swiss citizens living outside Switzerland rose by 8,517 persons or 1.23% last year. At the end of 2011, a total of 703,640 Swiss citizens were registered abroad. This figure equates to around 10% of all Swiss citizens.

Of the Swiss citizens registered abroad, the majority, 61.85% or 435,203, live in Europe – 420,653 of them in the EU. The largest Swiss community abroad by far – 183,754 – is to be found in France. This corresponds to 26.11% of all Swiss abroad. France is followed by Germany with 79,050 Swiss citizens (11.23%) and the USA with 75,637 (10.75%).

Just a single Swiss citizen is registered in each of the states of São Tomé and Príncipe, Micronesia and Kiribati.

545,844 Swiss abroad are eligible to vote in referenda and elections. 143,288 (26.25%) of these have been entered on an electoral roll in order to exercise their right to take part in elections and referenda in Switzerland. Compared with the previous year, this group has increased significantly more than the total number of Swiss abroad with a rise of 5.45%.

The statistical data on the Swiss abroad is now produced centrally by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) in Berne rather than by the embassies and consulates, which has resulted in greater accuracy.

Link: www.aso.ch > Information > Statistics

Appointments at the FDFA

At its meeting on 11 January 2012, the Federal Council appointed Mr Yves Rossier as the new State Secretary at the FDFA and Mr Benno Bättig as the new Secretary-General.

Yves Rossier, born in 1960, is a citizen of La Brillaz in the canton of Fribourg. He was the Director of the Federal Social Insurance Office at the FDHA from February 2004. He was previously responsible for setting up the Federal Gaming Board (ESBK), which he then ran for around four years. Yves Rossier actually began his career with the FDFA: he joined the FDFA/FDEA Integration Office in 1990 as a research assistant and, after passing an open competition, completed diplomatic training in 1993 at Political Affairs Division II before moving to the FDEA as an advisor to Federal Councillors Delamuraz and Couchepin.

Besides his mother tongue, French, Yves Rossier also speaks German and English. He holds a Degree in Law from the University of Fribourg. He went on to study European Law at the College of Europe in Bruges and was an Assistant to the Chair for International Private Law at the Faculty of Law of the University of Fribourg before completing a Master of Laws Degree at McGill University in Montreal. Yves Rossier is married and has five children.

Benno Bättig is 45 years old and a citizen of Willisau in the canton of Lucerne. He holds a Degree in Economics from the University of Fribourg and is a Master of Business Administration. Before moving to the private sector in 2007, he was a Personal Assistant to the Head of the FDHA from 2003 to 2007. He previously worked at the FDEA, where he held various positions in Switzerland and abroad, including Deputy Head of the Economic and Financial Affairs Division at the Swiss embassy in Washington from 1999 to 2002. Benno Bättig is married and has two children.

The Federal Council

This year, the official photograph of the Federal Council was taken in front of the monumental painting "Spring" from the "Four Seasons" series by the artist Franz

Gertsch at the request of Swiss President Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf. This backdrop is intended to symbolise the start of the new legislature and a new beginning.



From left to right:

Federal Councillor Johann N. Schneider-Ammann (Department of Economic Affairs – FDEA)

Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter (Department of Foreign Affairs – FDFA)

Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer (Vice-President, Department of Defence – DDPS)

Swiss President Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf (Department of Finance – FDF)

Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard (Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications – DETEC)

Federal Councillor Simonetta Sommaruga (Department of Justice and Police – FDJP)

Federal Councillor Alain Berset (Department of Home Affairs – FDHA)

Federal Chancellor Corina Casanova

ELECTIONS AND REFERENDA

The following proposals will be put to a vote on 17 June 2012:

- Popular initiative of 23 January 2009 "Eigene vier Wände dank Bausparen" (Home ownership through purchase savings scheme);
- Popular initiative of 11 August 2009 "Für die Stärkung der Volksrechte in der Aussenpolitik (Staatsverträge vors Volk!)" (Strengthening the rights of the people in foreign policy – decision on state treaties by the people!) and
- Amendment of 30 September 2011 to the Swiss Health Insurance Act (KVG) (Managed Care).

Further referendum dates currently unfilled for 2012: 23 September and 25 November.

POPULAR INITIATIVES

The following federal popular initiatives have been launched since the last edition of "Swiss Review" (deadlines for the collection of signatures in brackets):

- "Für eine Verflüssigung des Strassenverkehrs und weniger Stau (Motorrad- und Roller-Initiative)" (For a dilution of road traffic and less congestion – motorbike and scooter initiative) (07.08.2013)

- "Ja zur Wahl- und Stimmkontrolle" (Yes to voting checks) (31.07.2013)
- "JA zum Steuerabzug bei Wahl- und Stimmbeteiligung" (YES to tax relief for participation in elections and referenda) (29.05.2013)

The complete list can be found at www.bk.admin.ch, in German under "Aktuell / Wahlen und Abstimmungen / Hängige Volksinitiativen" (also available in French and Italian).

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