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Obtaining Swiss citizenship abroad

For Swiss citizens living abroad who have married a foreign national, the new Swiss Citizenship Act will apply from 1 January 2018 with regard to simplified naturalisation for their spouse. People living abroad will still be able to apply for simplified naturalisation in future. However, the requirements have changed in several respects.

Around 11,000 people are currently naturalised through the simplified process each year, around 2,000 of which live abroad. These are mainly the foreign spouses of Swiss citizens who, primarily because of their family situation, feel a close association with Switzerland even while living abroad. They maintain regular contact with Swiss people and frequently visit Switzerland.

Integration

“The aim is to naturalise people who are well integrated in Switzerland,” remarked Federal Councillor Simonetta Sommaruga during the parliamentary debate on the new Swiss Citizenship Act. A good degree of integration is already required by the law as it is now. However, the new law sets out what this means even more clearly. The integration criteria are specified in detail in the new ordinance in order to provide greater clarity. These integration criteria must also be met correspondingly by applicants living abroad. This analogous application means that applications from abroad are to be treated in the same way as those for simplified naturalisation from Switzerland. However, the circumstances abroad cannot be directly equated with those in Switzerland in all cases.

Application procedure

Spouses of Swiss citizens must have been in a conjugal partnership for at least six years and have a close relationship with Switzerland. Provided these requirements are met, an application for simplified naturalisation can be made to the Swiss representation responsible. The naturalisation fees of the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) have to be paid when making the application as before. However, the fees are no longer reimbursed if the naturalisation application is rejected. The Swiss representation checks how familiar the person seeking naturalisation is with Switzerland in an interview and produces a report for the SEM. The SEM then checks that all naturalisation requirements have been met, obtains refer-



ences and grants Swiss citizenship in the event of a positive decision.

Close association with Switzerland

The “close association with Switzerland” is a key naturalisation requirement for applications from abroad in particular. The applicable requirements have been tightened slightly under the new law. A person seeking naturalisation must have visited Switzerland at least three times for a minimum of five days on each occasion in the six years prior to the application being made. References must also be provided by persons residing in Switzerland who know the naturalisation applicant personally and can confirm their visits to Switzerland. Applicants are also generally required to pass a test proving basic knowledge of Swiss geography, history, politics and society. The applicant for naturalisation must also maintain contact with Swiss citizens and have a good knowledge of a Swiss national language. The citizenship ordinance does not specify a level of linguistic competence. As at present, language skills are assessed by the Swiss representation responsible in a personal interview.

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Online registration for Swiss citizens travelling abroad
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Summary

Foreign nationals who, owing to their family situation, feel a close association with Switzerland even while abroad can also apply for simplified naturalisation under the new law. However, the requirements concerning applications from abroad have been made more stringent in some areas. Anyone seeking simplified naturalisation from abroad should find out about the process from the Swiss representation responsible in good time. Further information on this matter can be found at: www.sem.admin.ch/sem/en/home/themen/buergerrecht/faq.html > Entry & Residence > FAQ > Swiss citizenship / Naturalisation > Fragen zum neuen Recht.

Other changes concerning renaturalisation

A close association with Switzerland is now also required for applications from abroad for re-naturalisation. This represents a tightening of the currently applicable provision. If the loss of citizenship took place more than 10 years ago, the applicant can only apply for re-naturalisation if they have resided in Switzerland for three years. A child whose grandmother possessed Swiss citizenship could previously apply for simplified naturalisation. Now, a child from a marriage between a Swiss woman and a foreign national whose mother possessed Swiss citizenship before or at the time of the child's birth can make an application for simplified naturalisation. The child must also have a close association with Switzerland in such cases. Simplified naturalisation will no longer be possible in future if only the grandmother or great-grandmother was a Swiss citizen.

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Federal referenda

Voting proposals are determined by the Federal Council at least four months before the voting date. The following three proposals will be put to the vote on 12 February 2017:

- Federal decree of 30 September 2016 on the simplified naturalisation of third-generation immigrants
- Federal decree of 30 September 2016 on establishing a fund for national roads and urban traffic (NRUTF)
- Federal act of 17 June 2016 on fiscal measures to increase the competitiveness of Switzerland as a business location (Corporate Tax Reform Act III)

Further voting dates 2017: 21 May, 24 September, 26 November

All information on the proposals (voting pamphlets, commitments, recommendations of Parliament and the Federal Council, electronic voting, etc.) can be found at www.admin.ch/votes.

Popular initiatives

The following new federal popular initiatives had been launched at the time of going to press (deadline for the collection of signatures in brackets):

- "For a Switzerland without synthetic pesticides" (29.05.2018)

The list of pending popular initiatives can be found at www.bk.admin.ch under Aktuell > Wahlen und Abstimmungen > Hängige Volksinitiativen.

Important notice

Please notify your Swiss representation of your email address(es) and mobile telephone number(s) and/or any changes to these and register at www.swissabroad.ch to ensure you do not miss any communications ("Swiss Review", newsletter from your representation, etc.).

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