

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 45 (2018)
Heft: 3

Rubrik: news.admin.ch

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Good services for a diverse Swiss community abroad

The FDFA has expanded, modernised and optimised consular services for the Swiss Abroad in recent years. Jürg Burri, Director of the Consular Directorate from 2014 to mid-2018, looks back.

When I took up my position as Director of the Consular Directorate in 2014, my first impression was that here is a highly motivated team enthusiastic about continually optimising the FDFA's services for the Swiss Abroad. Most of the staff at the Consular Directorate have lived abroad themselves and therefore appreciate what it entails.

The cornerstones of the FDFA's range of services for the Swiss Abroad – which the Consular Directorate supports and coordinates from Berne – are the following:

90 consular posts providing an extensive range of services worldwide

The Swiss Abroad have access to an extensive network of Swiss representations. The Swiss consular network is not just present in countries with at least 10,000 Swiss Abroad but rather worldwide. All consular posts provide the full range of services, including registration, the issuing of passports, welfare assistance and civil registry office duties.

Newer services are becoming increasingly important:

■ **FDFA website:** All the key consular information, including the latest advice on emigration and information about returning to Switzerland, can be found at all times on the FDFA's website under "Living abroad": www.eda.admin.ch.

■ **FDFA online desk:** The FDFA's online desk, which can also be found on the website, is relatively new but has already been used by more than 10,000 Swiss Abroad.

■ **FDFA helpline:** The FDFA's helpline in Berne is available 24/7 on 365 days of the year. The FDFA is therefore always there to provide support on telephone number 0800 24 7 365. The helpline answers around 65,000 queries a year, including from the Swiss Abroad.

■ **Mobile passport stations:** Our mobile passport stations are very popular. Swiss people abroad can have their biometric data recorded for the issuing of passports in over 50 cities worldwide which do not have a consulate.

■ **Cantonal passport offices:** Many Swiss Abroad still take advantage of the opportunity to have their biometric data for a new passport recorded at cantonal passport offices during a trip to their homeland thanks to an agreement between the cantons and the Consular Directorate.

Single point of contact for all Swiss Abroad

Switzerland today has a fully integrated network of services for the Swiss Abroad that compares very favourably with others internationally. Our well-used consular posts have high quality standards, not least thanks to the secondment of at least two transferable consular employees from Switzerland in every case. These colleagues receive support from head office and undergo further training. However, local staff also play a vital role. They make up more than two-thirds of our staff deployed in the field of consular affairs. Did you know that around 600 Swiss Abroad are also employed at Swiss representations abroad? The combination of seconded and local staff allows federal government not only to achieve a good cost/quality ratio for consular services but also to take advantage of a wealth of extensive and vitally important experience.

Close contact with the Swiss Abroad

Providing information for the Swiss Abroad is an important duty of federal government. It still uses a wide range of channels: in addition to various commercial services, swissinfo as well as the websites of the FDFA and the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA). The OSA produces its own magazine published in five languages on behalf of the FDFA. "Swiss Review", which is subsidised by the FDFA and which you are holding right now or reading online, also contains several pages providing information about the Swiss Abroad and their activities. It plays a key role in providing freely accessible information. The optimisation of the magazine's costs has been a major issue over recent years. It will be produced entirely by the OSA from 2019, and its future seems secure.

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Travel advice

www.eda.admin.ch/reisehinweise
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www.twitter.com/travel_edadfae

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Online registration for Swiss citizens travelling abroad
www.fdfa.admin.ch/itineris



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Ambassador Jürg Burri, Director of the Consular Directorate from 2014 to June 2018. He will take up the position of Swiss ambassador to Poland and Belarus in summer 2018. Photo: FDFA



Ambassador Johannes Matyassy, Head of the Asia and Pacific Division at the Directorate of Political Affairs, will be the Director of the Consular Directorate from August 2018. Photo: FDFA

In addition, there are also newer sources of information, such as the embassy newsletters. After providing their email addresses, 65 % of Swiss households abroad can today receive an embassy newsletter by email from the representations. Sixty-six Swiss representations produce such newsletters for anyone interested.

Efforts to maintain contact by the representations: The representations nevertheless also seek personal contact with the Swiss Abroad. In 2017, they organised 65 national celebrations themselves and supported 54 events organised by clubs. 33 representations also held an event for young Swiss Abroad. These are just some of the occasions to which the Swiss representations invite thousands of Swiss Abroad each year.

Via feedback from the representations and personal contact with a lot of people, but also through reports from the Council of the Swiss Abroad – the official body of the Swiss Abroad – the FDFA is aware that the services and availability of the Swiss representations are greatly appreciated. As far as the Consular Directorate is concerned, we appreciate the smooth cooperation with the institutions and societies of the Swiss Abroad and encourage all Swiss Abroad to get involved with such organisations or the OSA.

Digitalisation, changing life situations, new migration patterns and many other challenges will continue to shape the needs of the Swiss community abroad. The Consular Directorate will continue its endeavours to provide you all with modern services in cooperation with key partners, such as the OSA.

The quality of these services reflects the importance that federal government attaches to its citizens abroad. Helping to optimise these services over the past four years has given me tremendous personal pleasure – I wish the Swiss Abroad, the Consular Directorate and my successor all the very best for the future.

JÜRGEN BURRI, DIRECTOR OF THE CONSULAR DIRECTORATE

Votes and Elections

Voting proposals are determined by the Federal Council at least four months before the voting date.

Other voting dates in 2018: 23 September, 25 November

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

Popular initiatives

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

■ “Yes to the protection of children and young people against advertising (children and young people without tobacco advertising)” (20/9/2019)

The list of pending popular initiatives can be found in German at www.bk.admin.ch > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen

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EDA
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www.fdfa.admin.ch Vietnam (2018)

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