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vantages and disadvantages. For example, I can follow lectures from up in the mountains and save travel time. However, a lot of social interaction gets lost. Furthermore, a full day of lectures in front of a laptop feels twice as long as one in a classroom. Physical teaching and learning cannot be translated one-to-one into online learning. I believe it is even more important to actively engage students in the online format so that concentration remains constant.

#### What are your plans for the future?

At this stage I am not planning too far into the future, because the world is so uncertain at the moment. In the next few months I will focus on my Bachelor thesis and afterwards look for a job in the design field here in Switzerland.

#### What tips would you give to young Swiss people abroad who want to study in Switzerland?

I encourage them all to inform themselves about financial support. And to live in a shared apartment, as this is not only a more

affordable way of living but also a great way to get more in touch with Swiss culture. If your studies allow it, you should also look for a part-time job. I also advise spending as much free time as possible exploring this incredibly diverse country. Stay curious, be humble, be open to new experiences and ideas, actively pursue your goal and give yourself time to integrate and ask for support when you need it.

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## Federal votes

The Federal Council determines voting proposals at least four months before the voting date.

Everything you need to know about voting proposals (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by Parliament and the Federal Council etc.) is available at [www.admin.ch/votes](http://www.admin.ch/votes) or via the Federal Chancellery's VoteInfo app.

## Popular initiatives

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

- Federal Popular Initiative "For freedom and physical integrity" (01.06.2022)

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in German at

[www.bk.admin.ch](http://www.bk.admin.ch)

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## Travel Admin

Online-Registrierung von Auslandreisen  
Enregistrement en ligne de voyages à l'étranger  
Registrazione quando si viaggia all'estero  
Online Registration when travelling abroad

# “A Swiss citizen remains a Swiss citizen, wherever they live in the world”

An interview with Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis on the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for the Swiss Abroad and the projects for the future which meet the unique requirements of this heterogeneous community. “We are always focused on their needs,” affirms the head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Federal Councillor, the Covid crisis and the associated travel restrictions have left the Swiss Abroad isolated and have, in some instances, even placed them in a precarious personal or financial situation. What support does the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) offer?

The pandemic has presented us all with new challenges, in Switzerland and abroad. However, we have made a point of keeping all of our representations open and at the service of our citizens. I have asked my services to pay particular attention to requests for assistance received and to earmark the necessary funds to deal with the long-term consequences. In that regard, I am thinking primarily of welfare benefits for those who are no longer able to support themselves.

## And aside from the pandemic?

The FDFA carried out an extensive survey of our network in 2018 as well as a survey of the Swiss Abroad in 2019, for which we received more than 52,000 replies. This enabled us to identify several action points on which we are already working. To give an example, the first notification that a Swiss citizen is living abroad can now be made online, without the need to submit original documents to the representation.



Mingling with expats – Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis, together with the President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad Remo Gysin (left), surrounded by young Swiss Abroad at the Vevey Wine Festival in July 2019. Photo provided

## Is this process ongoing?

Yes: for 2021, it is a question of considering whether the formal framework, notably the Swiss Abroad Ordinance, is still pertinent to today's requirements and if the principles defined are efficiently applied. We remain attentive to our community.

**Another recurring theme: political rights. At the last federal vote even greater difficulties than usual were noted regarding the delivery of voting material. What can be done?**

Some 210,000 people are on the electoral register. The majority of these people live in Europe or North America, where few problems regarding such postal deliveries were recorded. There are problems with

sending voting materials for a proportion of the remaining electorate. With the Covid-19 crisis, which limited international postal delivery, these problems were further accentuated. However, although the Federal Chancellery is the coordinating body at federal level, the exercising of political rights remains the responsibility of the cantons, particularly regarding the delivery of voting material.

## So, what can the FDFA do specifically?

It is important to me to contribute to any action enabling the Swiss Abroad to be able to participate actively in public life. A pilot project with the Federal Chancellery is therefore planned for the June 2021



Problems with postal deliveries have made it impossible for many in the "Fifth Switzerland" to vote. The use of diplomatic couriers will therefore be trialled in June, says Cassis.   
Photo: Marco Zanoni

vote, where the use of diplomatic mail and representations abroad will be tested. Based on that, we will establish whether further steps can be taken.

**Three quarters of Swiss Abroad also hold at least one other nationality. What is the message that you would like to send them?** That a Swiss citizen remains a Swiss citizen, wherever they are in the world! And that is true regardless of the other nationality or nationalities that they may have.

**But there are still some problems?**

Yes. Particularly regarding consular protection. Possibilities for intervention are sometimes limited, notably if the person holds the na-

tionality of the country in which they are living. In this case, the local authorities consider the person as one of their own nationals only. This makes it even more difficult for us to act. But there is nothing surprising about that; it's the same in Switzerland.

**And what if members of the same family have different or multiple nationalities?**

We will never limit ourselves to just supporting one Swiss citizen. The family unit represents one of the paradigms of our work, as much when registering individuals with our representations as when we are acting on behalf of one of our citizens.

**Questions linked to multiple nationalities are not just specific to Switzerland, are they?**

No. And it is also important to highlight that these questions are sometimes brought up with an ulterior motive. For example, when a person is arbitrarily incarcerated in order to put pressure on the authorities of their country of origin. This is akin to a hostage situation, and I find it unacceptable. I personally participated in a virtual ministerial conference organised by Canada last February in order to launch an international initiative against the arbitrary detention of foreign citizens, notably those with multiple nationalities.

**Has the FDFA's Travel Admin app played a key role in handling the coronavirus crisis?**

This application, launched in 2019, indeed proved to be very useful last spring, both for informing us of our citizens stranded abroad and for

supporting and locating them. Suggestions made by users have enabled us to identify certain points for improvement. These improvements have already been integrated in the new version of the app, for example the possibility of updating travel information.

**On that subject, are you also working to modernise the channels of communication with the "Fifth Switzerland"?**

Travel Admin is also for the Swiss Abroad when they are travelling or on holiday. In this sense, we have already taken an important step for them, too. Another success was the virtual celebration of 1 August, which saw great popularity in a number of countries. That said, I share your view about the importance of ensuring a modern and efficient means of communication, both between and with the Swiss Abroad. I have mandated the Consular Directorate to create a specific mobile interface, for example an app, in order to facilitate contact and information exchange. This application should become available in 2022.

**To close, do you have anything to add on the importance of the Swiss Abroad in Switzerland's bilateral relations?**

The defence of the interests of Swiss citizens, wherever they live, represents one of the fundamental aspects of the Confederation's work. I can assure you that this dimension is taken into account during our international negotiations. A recent example is the "Mind the gap" policy. This strategy enabled us to assure the continuity of our relationship with the United Kingdom, despite Brexit, in particular for the Swiss Abroad.

(FDFA)