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## Federal votes

The proposals submitted to the people are set by the Federal Council at least four months prior to the voting date.

The Federal Council decided at its session on 26 June 2024 to submit the following proposals to the people on 24 November 2024:

- Federal Decree of 29 September 2023 on the 2023 Expansion Phase for the National Highways (BBI 2023 2302)
- Amendment of 29 September 2023 of the Code of Obligations (Tenancy law: sub-letting) (BBI 2023 2288)
- Amendment of 29 September 2023 of the Code of Obligations (Tenancy law: termination for personal needs) (BBI 2023 2291)
- Amendment of 22 December 2023 of the Federal Act on Health Insurance (HIA) (Standard funding of services) (BBI 2023 31)

All information on proposals submitted to the people (voting pamphlets, committees, recommendations by the parliament, Federal Council etc.) can be found at [www.admin.ch/abstimmungen](http://www.admin.ch/abstimmungen) or in the Federal Chancellery VoteInfo app.



## Popular initiatives

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

- For Switzerland to accede to the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (initiative for the prohibition of nuclear weapons) (2 January 2026)

The list of pending popular initiatives is available in French, German and Italian at <https://www.bk.admin.ch/> > Politische Rechte > Volksinitiativen > Hängige Volksinitiativen



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## The birth of Switzerland's consular network

If a Swiss loses her ID in Cuba, she will go to the Swiss consulate. If a Swiss couple in Australia become parents or a Swiss in Kenya needs support, they will also get in touch with the relevant Swiss representation abroad – benefiting from a diplomatic network that can trace its beginnings as far back as 1798, when Switzerland's first-ever consulate opened in Bordeaux.



The French port of Bordeaux offers indirect access to the Atlantic and was an important hub for international trade and European emigration overseas. Painting by Pierre Lacour, 1806. Photo: Alamy

Swiss representations now have an established presence around the globe. Based in almost every country, they act as the first point of contact for Swiss Abroad in need of help and support. But this has not always been the case. The network of Swiss representations abroad grew gradually during the course of the last two centuries, starting in Bordeaux in 1798.

People carrying out duties of a diplomatic or consular nature on behalf of individual cantons were already stationed in

friendly countries before 1798. But no one actually represented the country as a whole. This is because the Old Swiss Confederacy – Switzerland before Napoleon's invasion – amounted to nothing more than a loose collection of states with few common interests.

The ideals of the French Revolution shaped Europe at the end of the 18th century. And the new values of 'liberty, equality, fraternity' also circulated around Switzerland, leading to increasing protests and

unrest as early as the 1790s. The French invaded the Old Swiss Confederacy in March 1798, establishing the centralised Helvetic Republic on 12 April 1798.

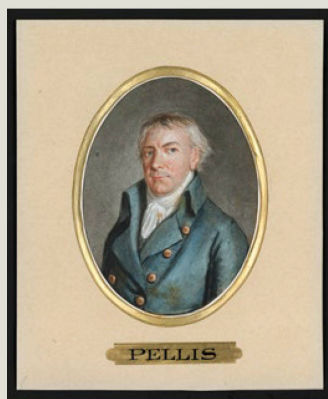
As soon as there was a stable political environment again, key priorities fell into place for the Helvetic Republic at national and international level. As economic links around the globe grew stronger, representing Swiss interests abroad became more important. On 25 August 1798, the Helvetic Republic appointed Marc-Antoine Pellis as its inaugural

consul – assigning him to Bordeaux, where Switzerland’s first-ever consulate was subsequently established.

### Marc-Antoine Pellis, the first Swiss consul

Marc-Antoine Pellis (1753–1809) from Vaud was a senator and politician during the Helvetic Republic. After spending time in other parts of Europe, Pellis returned to Switzerland as the ideas of the French Revolution were taking hold. In Vaud, which was still governed by Berne at the time, he took part in open-air political ‘banquets’ in support of revolution and against Bernese rule. When Berne put a stop to these banquets in June 1791, arresting the ringleaders and putting Vaud under military occupation, he was forced to flee.

Pellis settled in the French city of Bordeaux on the Garonne River in 1793, establishing himself as a merchant. The Helvetic



Marc-Antoine Pellis, originally from Romainmôtier, was appointed Switzerland’s first-ever consul in 1798.

Picture source:

Atelier de numérisation Ville de Lausanne, Margot Roth

Republic, a centralised state modelled on the French Revolution, appointed him as consul in 1798. Three years later in 1801, he stepped down as consul and returned to Switzerland, where he became a member of the legislative assembly and the senate. Pellis went on to play a political role in both Vaud and the Helvetic Republic.

### For business and community

Following Bordeaux, consulates were also established in Marseille, Genoa, Nantes and Trieste. It is no coincidence that major Eu-

ropean seaports were home to the first five consulates, as economic interests were the main reason behind the Swiss consulates. At a time when steamers, railways and telegraphs had not yet revolutionised international trade, direct relationships at the point of sale were of crucial importance. These port cities served as international trading hubs and as the starting points of routes connecting Europe with destinations overseas including colonies in Africa and Asia.

Economic interests were the primary reason for setting up the first consulates,

Switzerland’s consular network assists Swiss nationals with a wide range of administrative formalities and offers subsidiary support, subject to the principle of individual responsibility and certain other requirements.

but not the only reason. Diplomatic missions were necessary to cater for notable numbers of Swiss who had settled in the aforementioned cities – expat communities consisting of merchants and traders. To a certain extent, these cities also served as



Urs Badertscher, the last Swiss consul general in Bordeaux (2005–2008), gives a speech to mark the closure of the consulate on Cours Xavier Arnozan.

Photo: Jean-Michel Begey

reception points for people wishing to emigrate overseas. Switzerland had been a country of emigrants since the mid-16th century, with poverty, underemployment, and population pressure forcing young Swiss to leave the country. Mercenaries, teachers, artisans, scientists and academics also began to settle in numerous European cities in addition to the merchants and traders, before venturing further overseas from the 19th century onwards. Due to demand, the first Swiss overseas consulate was established in 1819 in the Brazilian coastal city of Rio de Janeiro. A consulate in New York was then established a few years later in 1822.

For the most part, the honorary consuls who worked at these representations were Swiss nationals already living locally. It took a long time before their remit was clearly defined – consuls had to ascertain their duties by correspondence or through formal briefings. Responsibilities included sorting out passports, reporting back to the Helvetic Republic on how its citizens were conducting themselves abroad, and monitoring adherence to bilateral treaties.

Or, as the Swiss consul in Marseille, Vincent Perdonnet, wrote in a letter to the then foreign minister, Louis François Bégoz, in 1799, “extending a fraternal hand to those in unfortunate or unfair hardship as well as protecting others from the disastrous and appalling consequences of hate and deceit”.

### Serving the “Fifth Switzerland” for over 225 years

Switzerland’s consular network has been a fixture since Marc-Antoine Pellis’s appointment in Bordeaux as the first-ever consul all those years ago. The network has continually expanded, and today there is a clear delineation of diplomatic, consular and economic responsibilities. It is also a network that continues to evolve and keep with the times. But the core function of consulates remains the same: to be the first point of contact for Swiss nationals around the world.

LUCA PANARESE, FDFA