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Reorganisation of Switzerland's diplomatic and consular network – set-up of regional consular centres and support measures

Switzerland relies on a network of around 140 diplomatic and consular representations distributed throughout the world to implement its foreign policy and to protect its interests. This is a remarkable network for a nation of Switzerland's size and is ranked ninth worldwide. The allocation of resources within the Swiss network is evaluated on an ongoing basis. Over the past 15 years, these resources have been reduced in Western Europe (closure of representations in Naples, Bordeaux and Dresden, etc.) and in North America (e.g. closure in Houston) in order to meet new requirements relating to the emergence of countries in southern and eastern regions (e.g. opening of representations in Astana, Saint Petersburg and Guangzhou). More recently, budgetary considerations – implementation of savings on personnel and operational expenses – have resulted in the closure of our general consulates in Dusseldorf, Genoa and Edinburgh.

The current revaluations are based on an analysis of the efficiency of the provision of consular services to the Swiss abroad while maintaining or improving the quality of public service. This analysis has resulted in the production of lists of services specific to each representation which has led to the closure of consular sections within embassies in favour of the set-up of regional consular centres (see the list in the box). It showed that the embassies concerned all offer the full range of consular services, including the production of identity documents for civil status matters, attestations and the issuing of visas, etc., in addition to their diplomatic commitments covering political, cultural, economic and commercial matters. These similar products are therefore provided by consular services relatively close to one another individually using key resources in terms of personnel as well as infrastructure and equipment (e.g. equipment for recording biometric data). Our embassy in Bratislava is a good example of the inefficient use of our resources in the context of consular services alone. An output of 42 passports and 3 visas a year does not justify the presence of two full-time transferable employees. The concept of concentrating a complete list of consular services in a single location produces significant economies of scale. It effectively involves the allocation of personnel not disproportionate to but instead in line with the requirements of Swiss citizens in neighbouring regions registered under one roof as well as investment in equipment limited to just one location in a given region. The transfer of administrative units to regional consular centres aims to optimise resources. However, it should be noted that this concentration proce-

cedure should not be compared to the closure of representations. The Swiss presence remains strong in the countries where consular services have been relocated. Our ambassadors will carry out their diplomatic tasks and ensure human proximity with our fellow citizens in their countries of residence or accreditation.

However, the FDFA is aware that the closure of representations and the concentration of tasks in regional consular centres have significant implications for the Swiss abroad. This is due to the transfer of certain tasks to other representations, geographical distance and the subsequent loss of the sense of proximity. We understand, for example, that having to travel to have biometric data recorded could be an inconvenience for the persons concerned.

With a view to maintaining and consolidating high-quality public service, the FDFA has therefore provided for various support measures, such as the establishment of a Consular Directorate which aims to deliver public service of the highest standard. The helpline that will respond to telephone calls and e-mails, progressively reaching availability 365 days of the year, is one of the flagship services. With regard to these measures, it should be noted that local personnel will remain in the embassies, breaking away from their consular services to perform certain tasks in close collaboration with the regional consular centres. Transportable services with mobile equipment for recording biometric data will also be set up. It should be noted that anyone can carry out this procedure at any passport office in Switzerland (for example, during a visit to Switzerland) or at any Swiss representation abroad providing consular services in agreement with the representation where the applicant is registered. Drop-in points will be set up for official affirmation of subsistence certificates for Old Age and Survivors' Insurance (e.g. Swiss clubs and honorary consulates). When consular protection becomes necessary, we intend to rely more on our network of honorary consulates which will be made aware of the various aspects of their role – including their proximity to the Swiss community – at a conference that will bring them together for the first time in Switzerland in August 2011. In this regard, it is worth pointing out that the FDFA has opened more than 100 honorary consulates since 1990, in or-

CONSULAR SERVICE (CLOSED)	REGIONAL CONSULAR CENTRE (OPEN)	DATE
Tirana (Albania)	Balkans (Pristina)	01.04.2011
Harare (Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Angola)	Southern Africa (Pretoria)	01.04.2011
Sofia (Bulgaria)	South East Europe (Bucharest)	15.04.2011
Port-au-Prince (Haiti)	Hispaniola (Saint Domingo)	01.05.2011
Brussels (Belgium)		
Luxembourg (Luxembourg)	Benelux (The Hague)	16.05.2011
Helsinki (Finland)		
Copenhagen (Denmark)		
Oslo (Norway)	Nordic Countries (Stockholm)	30.05.2011
Ljubljana (Slovenia)		
Zagreb (Croatia)		
Budapest (Hungary)		
Bratislava (Slovakia)		Summer
Prague (Czech Republic)	Vienna	2011



der to take account of the development of Swiss interests and the emergence of new requirements, primarily in the developing countries. The FDFA will now ensure the participation of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad in the nomination procedures in order to optimally meet local requirements and the expectations of the Swiss abroad. It goes without saying that the FDFA will support the development of online services. It will also engage in forms of cooperation with states in the Schengen area and intensify its partnership with Austria and Germany in the field of consular protection.

We will keep the readers of "Swiss Review" up to date with future developments regarding the Swiss diplomatic and consular network. This undergoes constant change as its form is determined by the principle of universality in particular (Switzerland aims to establish relations with all countries worldwide), new geopolitical challenges and the protection of Swiss interests in their entirety, including its role of providing services for Swiss citizens. JFL.

POPULAR INITIATIVES:

By the time of going to press, the following popular initiatives had been launched since the last edition:

(deadlines for collection of signatures in brackets)

- Federal popular initiative "Für eine öffentliche Krankenkasse" (For a system of public health insurance) (01.08.2012)
- Federal popular initiative "Für eine nachhaltige und ressourceneffiziente Wirtschaft (Grüne Wirtschaft)" (For an economy based on sustainability and efficient resource management – green economy) (08.09.2012)
- Federal popular initiative "Für den Schutz fairer Löhne (Mindestlohn-Initiative)" (For the protection of fair wages – minimum wage initiative) (17.12.2012)

Please visit the site www.bk.admin.ch/aktuell/abstimmung. This contains a list of pending referendum proposals and popular initiatives in addition to the signature forms, if available. Please complete, sign and send the forms directly to the relevant initiative committee.

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Where most Swiss abroad live

