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To the frontiers – and beyond!

Criminality, organised smuggling and illegal immigration are presenting huge challenges for society and the state. Trafficking in people, drugs and weapons, money laundering and criminal tourism pose a threat to the security and wellbeing of the population and have a detrimental impact on Switzerland as a location for business. The 2,000-strong Swiss Border Guard unit – the armed and uniformed division of the Swiss Customs Administration – is defying these threats.

Our borders are busy places – every day around 700,000 people, 350,000 cars and 20,000 heavy goods vehicles cross Switzerland's approximately 2,000 km long border. Federal government received 65 million Swiss francs every day from customs duties in 2012. These revenues are required by the state to perform its duties on behalf of the Swiss people. On an average day the border guards detect 55 legal offences, arrest 37 wanted persons, uncover 39 violations of the Asylum Act and Aliens Act, seize three kilos of narcotic substances and confiscate five falsified documents.

Protecting the economy, security and wellbeing

The border guards are deployed around the clock on our borders, in the border regions, on boundary waters, on international rail services, at airports and also abroad to protect Switzerland and its inhabitants. They perform security policing, customs and immigration duties. This diversity makes their role an exciting one. Dealing with a wide range of different people and cultures presents great challenges for the border guards. Carrying out checks on people always involves encroaching upon privacy and requires the ability to "make judgements, reach decisions and react appropriately". Specialist expertise and an insight into human nature are needed. The border guards must be physically and mentally fit. A career in the Swiss Border Guard unit can quite literally take you to the frontiers and beyond, since the border guards are also deployed abroad in, for example, operations involving Frontex, the European border agency.

Trans-frontier cooperation with partner authorities is also vital to combat cross-border criminality.

Joining the border guards

Prospective border guards undertake a rigorous three-year training period with a modular structure to prepare them for their tasks. The theoretical part of the training takes place at the Swiss Customs Administration's training centre in Liestal (canton of Basel-Land). The practical training is carried out in a region to which the aspiring border guards are assigned.

The basic training in the first year consists of theoretical modules and practical



deployment at the border. Highly experienced instructors provide the trainees with support. The training period is just as diverse as the future role itself. Topics covered include border guard and customs service, law, criminalistics, searches, document inspection, firearms training, security and intervention methods, sport and psychosocial skills. Once the first year of service has been completed successfully – including all modules and professional examinations – trainees take the "Swiss Federal Border Guard Qualification" practical examination.

Trainees' skill sets are further enhanced in the second and third years of service with advanced courses in search and rescue, document inspection, criminalistics, security operations and operational tactics. The training is completed once these modules have been passed. Border guards can then pursue the specialist and/or management career paths.

Specialist and management careers

To enable its employees to fulfil their potential, the Swiss Border Guard unit provides them with the opportunity to specialise in handling guard dogs as well as narcotics and explosives detection dogs or to focus on, for example, document forgeries, vehicle checks, narcotic substance analyses or x-raying of baggage and other items. Border guards are also prepared for deployment abroad on security missions concerning civil aviation (air/ground marshals).

Employees with exceptional management and organisational skills can pursue career opportunities as head of operations, head of team or unit, head of service or as officer. The management career path with management training at the Swiss Police Institute and the Federal Training Centre paves the way for sitting the "Higher Professional Examination", an advanced vocational qualification at tertiary level.

ARTICLE BY STAFF-ADJUTANT ATTILA LARDORI OF THE SWISS BORDER GUARD UNIT

RIGOROUS SELECTION PROCEDURE

Anyone wishing to join the Swiss Border Guard unit is subjected to a rigorous selection procedure. In addition to team-working and communication skills, interpersonal skills, strong powers of comprehension, independence, reliability, assertiveness and perseverance, applicants must meet the following criteria:

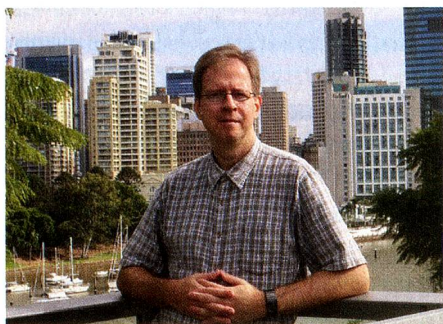
- Swiss citizenship or dual citizenship. Dual citizens cannot have undertaken military service abroad.
- Possession of a Swiss Certificate of Competence following professional basic training of at least three years' duration or an equivalent qualification (e.g. Swiss university entrance qualification).
- Age between 20 and 35.
- Minimum height of 168 cm for male applicants and 160 cm for female applicants.
- Class B driving licence (vehicles with a total weight of up to 3,500 kg and no more than eight seats plus the driver's seat).

Working in the Swiss Border Guard unit requires a high degree of individual responsibility and offers many challenges as well as training and development opportunities. It also provides progressive working conditions and employee benefits in accordance with the Federal Personnel Act.

Swiss Image-Ambassadors

At the 91st Congress of the Swiss Abroad in Davos, Federal Councillor Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf emphasised the vital contribution that the Swiss abroad make to Switzerland's positive image: "Swiss citizens who settle abroad become ambassadors for our nation." Presence Switzerland asked two Swiss abroad whether they actually see themselves as ambassadors for Switzerland in their new countries.

Marc Andre Godat, IT consultant and CSA delegate, in Australia since 1999:



Do you see yourself as an ambassador promoting Switzerland's image in your new country?

Yes, and that is certainly true for most of the Swiss living here. The distance from your native country is a major factor. Expats in Australia cannot simply return home to Switzerland for a long weekend. But as we still long for a raclette or fondue or want to celebrate 1 August, we often do so at club events. There is always an interesting dialogue with Australians and cultural exchange is quickly established.

What do you do on behalf of Switzerland?

On a public level, I was President of the Swiss Society in Queensland for four years. Our club's mission to "preserve and promote the Swiss heritage and goodwill between Australia and Switzerland through social and cultural activities" is put into practice at every event. We now even have some Australian and international members of the club. On a private level, I try to make our Australian friends more familiar with Swiss culture, but have failed to achieve much success with encouraging people to "look one another in the eye" when making a toast.

How is Switzerland perceived in your country of residence?

The general perception is of a nation of banks, chocolate, high cost of living, cows and "The Sound of Music", while buzzwords like Xstrata, UBS, globalisation, FIFA and neutrality also sometimes crop up. Except for occasional articles on dubious banking practices or the questionable activities of some major Swiss companies, such as in the mining sector, the media do not provide much coverage. There is much greater interest in Germany, seen as the powerhouse of Europe, and, of course, the UK. Switzerland nevertheless enjoys a very good reputation and is seen by many Australians as a dream destination because of its picture-postcard scenery.

Which aspects of Switzerland would you like to raise the profile of?

First of all, I'd say tourism. Australians who travel to Europe usually visit the UK, France or Italy. Switzerland is left out as it is often regarded as being too expensive or exclusive. They do not realise that the cost of renting a chalet in the Swiss mountains for a week is the same as a three-night stay in a hotel on the Gold Coast in Queensland. Secondly, Switzerland is at the forefront of innovation, research and educational institutions. In the post-mining investment boom, Australia must rethink its strategy in order to open up new markets. Training and development opportunities are vital and doors are opening here that could be attractive and lucrative for both countries.

What do you make of the "Heidi vs. high-tech" slogan?

They are essentially two buzzwords that are more powerful together than alone. The Australians I know who have worked in Switzerland and returned home would go back in an instant. Perhaps the slogan "high-tech Heidi" would be more fitting as this is the combination that makes Switzerland such an attractive place to work. A good salary and high standard of living appeal to the best minds in the world and this is where Switzerland can come up trumps – "game on"!

What role could the Swiss abroad play here?

Every expat is an ambassador and there are plenty of Australians who enjoy trav-

elling and take an interest in different cultures. There are always situations in which you have the opportunity to provide friends or anyone interested in an insight into life in Switzerland. Joining a club is also beneficial. Swiss clubs have much more to offer than fondue and "Jass" evenings. They provide a platform for cultural exchange and a network for establishing social and professional relationships. Who can afford NOT to belong to a network today?

Bianca Rubino, a student, has lived in Italy since childhood:



Do you see yourself as an ambassador promoting Switzerland's image in your new country?

Born in the Bernese Seeland city of Biel, I have always seen myself as an ambassador and promoter for Switzerland. I'd say, above all, at the places where I live and study – Trapani and Modena in Italy, but also in the Netherlands, France and Spain, where I have enhanced my knowledge in "European studies".

What do you do on behalf of Switzerland?

I often speak to my Italian friends about Switzerland and give them an idea of what our country is like beyond the obvious clichés, even if raclette evenings have been a standard at home for years. I speak with other Swiss in dialect at the events held by the Swiss Club in Sicily and am president of the Youth Committee of the Umbrella Organisation of the Swiss Societies in Italy. We organise events and encourage young Swiss abroad, mainly via social media, to attend the congress of the Umbrella Organisation in Italy.

How is Switzerland perceived in your country of residence?

Italians mainly regard Switzerland as a neighbouring country characterised by its financial centre and exclusive ski resorts. Besides economic policy issues, they primarily focus on tourism, including Switzerland's natural beauty and its "Heidi image", as well as the culinary clichés of chocolate and cheese with holes in it. Swiss technology is also widely known thanks to the expression "as accurate as a Swiss watch".

Which aspects of Switzerland would you like to raise the profile of?

Switzerland possesses many assets in terms of its political and democratic system and its four national languages make it an extraordinary place. I have always been fascinated by these aspects and believe they should be marketed more effectively. Our linguistic diversity pays testimony to co-existence on an administrative and day-to-day basis, even in smaller bilingual towns like Biel, while it also reflects Switzerland's cultural wealth.

What do you make of the "Heidi vs. high-tech" slogan?

In my view, Switzerland is strongly attached to its traditions, landscapes and natural environment – mountains, lakes, meadows – in other words, everything associated with "Heidi". But Switzerland is also a high-tech country. The two concepts should not be seen as contradictory, therefore, but instead as complementary and mutually compatible.

What role could the Swiss abroad play here?

The Swiss abroad have the opportunity to embrace and convey both concepts – "Heidi" and "high-tech" – as acting in synthesis rather than conflicting. They can attend traditional yodelling events in the mountains, on one hand, but also participate in political life in Switzerland thanks to the technologically advanced system of e-voting, on the other hand.



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Notify your embassy or consulate general of your email address and mobile phone number or any changes to them.

Register at www.swissabroad.ch to ensure you do not miss any communications ("Swiss Review", newsletters from your representation, etc.).

The latest "Swiss Review" and previous issues can be read and/or printed out at any time at www.revue.ch. "Swiss Review" (and "Gazzetta Svizzera" in Italy) is sent to all Swiss households abroad registered with an embassy or consulate general free of charge either electronically (via email or as an iPad/Android app) or in printed format.

ELECTIONS AND REFERENDA

Three proposals will be put to the vote on 24 November 2013:

- Popular initiative "1:12 – for fair pay"
- Popular initiative "Family initiative: tax relief also for parents who look after their own children"
- Amendment of 22 March 2013 to the Federal Act on Tax for the Use of the National Road System (Nationalstrassenabgabegesetz, NSAG)

All information on the proposals (voting pamphlet, committees, party statements, electronic voting, etc.) can be found at www.ch.ch/abstimmungen.

2014 referendum dates: 9 February; 18 May; 28 September; 30 November.

POPULAR INITIATIVES

No new popular initiatives had been launched since the publication of edition 4/2013 of "Swiss Review" and by the time of going to press for this edition. The list of pending popular initiatives can be found at www.bk.admin.ch under Aktuell > Wahlen und Abstimmungen > Hängige Volksinitiativen.

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