

Notes from Parliament

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Honorary representations: to do or not to do – that is the question

In addition to Switzerland's professional representations abroad (such as embassies, consulates general, missions, cooperation offices of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC etc.), the FDFA also maintains a network of around 200 honorary representations worldwide.

Can honorary consulates issue Swiss passports or visas? Can they conduct marriages or legalise documents? These are just a few of the questions that honorary representatives are often asked. This is continually highlighted at the honorary consul conferences – most recently held in Sydney in March 2013.

Honorary consuls are always assigned to a Swiss representation and represent the ambassador or consul general. They act as the eyes and ears of the Swiss authorities locally. In this role, they also represent Switzerland at local events, such as national holiday celebrations and other official occasions.

Honorary representatives maintain a network of contacts at local level – in the administration and in business, cultural, educational and scientific circles. They are in regular contact with the embassy or consulate general and provide information about opportunities to represent Swiss interests in their geographical sphere of influence. They

also provide a link to local Swiss communities abroad and help the Swiss abroad to keep in touch with one another and with Switzerland.

Local Swiss societies are in direct contact with the embassy or consulate general without using the services of the honorary representation. However, they are obviously part of the network of the honorary consuls on a social level.

In agreement with the representation to which they report, honorary representatives can also provide assistance for Swiss citizens in emergency situations, whether due to accidents, illness, theft or arrest. They keep the representation informed about local developments and/or security issues that may affect Swiss citizens abroad and may be of interest for the FDFA's travel advice.

Switzerland's accession to the Schengen Area in 2008 significantly changed the position of the honorary representatives. Swiss honorary staff can no longer issue visas, for example. The only administrative task carried out directly for the local Swiss community abroad is the confirmation of life certificates for the Swiss old-age and survivors' insurance/disability insurance (AHV/IV). All other consular services are provided by the embassy or consulate general.

The FDFA once again wishes to thank all Swiss honorary staff for their invaluable contribution on behalf of Switzerland and our citizens abroad.

Text: Ambassador Marion Weichelt Krupski (Wellington) and Ambassador Marcel Stutz (Canberra)



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Entering 2014 full of vigour

The FDFA's Consular Directorate wishes all Swiss abroad a wonderful festive season and every success in the New Year, and looks forward to working with you in 2014!

Front row, left to right: Markus Natsch, Nelly Gagnaux, Peter Zimmerli
 Back row, left to right: Thomas Kalau, Gerhard Brügger, Maria-Teresa Minerva, Stephan Winkler



Important notice

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

Register at www.swissabroad.ch to ensure you do not miss any communications ("Swiss Review", newsletter 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 electronically (via email and as an iPad/Android app) or in printed format.

ELECTIONS AND REFERENDA

Three proposals will be put to the vote on 9 February 2014:

- Federal decree of 20 June 2013 on the financing and expansion of the railway infrastructure (direct counterproposal to the popular initiative "Für den öffentlichen Verkehr" (For public transport) – (see also page 15);
- Popular initiative of 4 July 2011 "Abtreibungsfinanzierung ist Privatsache – Entlastung der Krankenversicherung durch Streichung der Kosten des Schwangerschaftsabbruchs aus der obligatorischen Grundversicherung" (The funding of abortion is a private matter – relief for health insurance through the removal of abortion costs from mandatory basic insurance) – (see also page 15);
- Popular initiative of 14 February 2012 "Gegen Masseneinwanderung" (Against mass immigration) – (see also page 14)

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

Further referendum dates in 2014: 18 May; 28 September; 30 November.

POPULAR INITIATIVES

No new popular initiatives had been launched since the publication of edition 5/2013 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 > Aktuell > Wahlen und Abstimmungen > Hängige Volksinitiativen.

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