

First hurdle taken with Swiss banks

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The Swiss Parliament for Introduction of Automatic Exchange of Information

Over the last three years our Ambassador in Wellington Dr. David Vogelsanger and I have been working vigorously in an attempt to abolish Section 70 and the illegal confiscation of our self-funded AHV-pension by the New Zealand Government through networking and using all channels and contacts at our disposal. Many Swiss living in New Zealand also sent letters in 2017 to Swiss parliamentarians and to the Federal Council conveying their disapproval and disappointment in this long standing unsolved issue.

Our aim was to delay the parliamentary approval regarding the introduction of the Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI) with New Zealand until the Swiss and New Zealand Governments have signed a Social Security Agreement, abolishing Section 70 for Swiss pensioners living in New Zealand who are entitled to a Swiss pension (AHV). It was never our intention to permanently block the introduction of the AEOI.

As I have written in a previous article, on September 27th the National Council (Nationalrat) rejected the introduction of the Automatic Exchange of Information (AEOI) with New Zealand. This was possible with the SVP, CVP and some of the FDP parliamentarians supporting our cause. The Nation Council expressed deep concern over the Swiss in New Zealand being disadvantaged over all other Swiss living abroad, because the Swiss pension (AHV) is confiscated by the New Zealand Government when receiving New Zealand Superannuation.

On December 5th the Council of States (Ständerat) did not vote on the issue, thus following the recommendations of the Federal Council (Bundesrat), and sent the issue back to the National Council who on the following day overturned their previous decision and followed the recommendations of the Federal Council, voting for the implementation of the Automatic Exchange of Information with New Zealand.

At first glance this might look like an outright defeat for all the hard work and effort that has been put into this issue. In my opinion however, we have achieved more than meets the eye.

- Never before has Section 70 been an issue in the Swiss Newspaper

and other Media. With our protest we have received an enormous amount of publicity, sympathy and understanding. Unfortunately some Media reports were nonfactual and negative but most print Media clearly brought our point of view over to the readers.

- Never before did the National Council (Nationalrat) discuss this issue in such depth. On September 27th, Section 70 was discussed vigorously in the parliamentary session.

- On December the 5th the Council of States (Ständerat) had a very long and fierce debate concerning Section 70, not only among themselves but also with Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer who was present at the session. The discussion concerning Section 70 was long and intense, spearheaded by Filippo Lombardi (CVP) and vigorously supported by Hannes Germann (SVP) defending our cause to the end.

- For the first time ever, all Swiss parliamentarians (both Chambers) and the Federal Council are now fully aware of the situation Swiss pensioners in New Zealand are facing and the unfair treatment our pensioners are receiving with their Swiss AHV. The overwhelming majority of parliamentarians had up to this point of time no idea what Section 70 was all about and how the Swiss pension (AHV) was being robbed by the New Zealand Government. Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer promised the Council of States to look into this matter in more depth as had been done in the past.

I personally do not think that this is the end. No doubt, our Ambassador will continue his unremitting effort in this matter and I will also continue my crusade. Several parliamentarians indicated that this issue needs to be further discussed with New Zealand at parliamentary level and not at secretarial levels which has been the case in the past.

The next 3 years will also show us if NZ First and the Green Party who openly oppose Section 70, together with Labour who are open concerning changes with Section 70, will take some action on this unjust issue.

Peter Ehrler
Elected Member of the Swiss Abroad
Representing New Zealand

First hurdle taken with Swiss banks

On September 19th the Swiss Council of States (Ständerat) adopted a motion requiring all Swiss banks in the category "too big to fail" to accept Swiss citizens living abroad as bank clients. The motion came from Filippo Lombardi (CVP/TI). The following banks all fall under this category: UBS, CS, Zürcher Kantonalbank, Postfinance and Raiffeisen Bank.

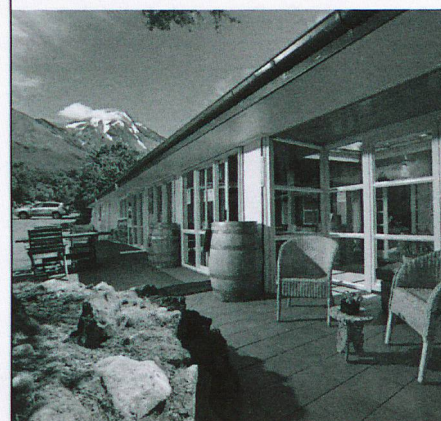
This all comes after the National Council (Nationalrat) also adopted a motion from the Foreign Affairs Committee on September 11th demanding that PostFinance accepts Swiss living abroad. The Swiss abroad should be able to open bank accounts with PostFinance and also be issued with credit cards, with more or less the same conditions as people living in Switzerland.

These are the first positive signs in almost a decade. The next step will be that both motions once again need to be discussed and also be approved by the other chamber in the upcoming parliamentary sessions. Both chambers (Nationalrat and Ständerat) need to approve both motions. Once the Chambers have approved both motions, then it will go back to the Federal Council (Bundesrat) who will need to take action.

Peter Ehrler

Elected Council Member of the Swiss Abroad.


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