

The Swiss Abroad Act enters into force

On 7 October the Federal Council set the entry into force of the Swiss Abroad Act for 1 November 2015 and adopted the Swiss Abroad Ordinance and the Ordinance on Fees of the FDFA. The Act brings together in a single piece of legislation the most important provisions on Swiss nationals living abroad. The two ordinances contain provisions for its implementation. The new rules take into account the increasing international mobility of Swiss citizens.

The following are of particular importance for Swiss nationals living abroad:

- **GUICHET UNIQUE**

The concept of the *Guichet unique* (single counter) is now codified in the Act, providing a one-stop shop for Swiss citizens with questions about travel abroad and other matters of interest to Swiss nationals living abroad. The *Guichet unique* can provide information and advice and if necessary direct the client to the competent office. It is a virtual counter service provided by the relevant Swiss representations and the units responsible at head office in Bern, such as the FDFA Helpline (tel. +41 800 24 7 365). **You can therefore continue to contact us or the FDFA Helpline at any time.**

- **OBLIGATION TO REGISTER**

For Swiss citizens living abroad, registration with the competent representation remains mandatory. This is also the case for changes in **civil status**. **Registration with your representation is therefore still required and changes to civil status must be notified. Please provide us with your email address so that we can contact you more easily.**

- **REGISTERING A CHANGE OF ADDRESS**

The Act simplifies the procedure for registered persons to notify a change of address. If you move house abroad and acquire a new domicile, simply inform the representation of your new address. The representation will then make the necessary change in the Register of Swiss citizens Abroad. **When moving house abroad, you no longer need to de-register and re-register; simply notify the change of address.**

- **POLITICAL RIGHTS**

The previous rules for the exercising of political rights by Swiss citizens living abroad have been largely incorporated into the Act. The law has been simplified in some details. You are now only entitled to exercise your political rights in the **commune** where you were last domiciled in Switzerland. Swiss citizens living abroad who have never been domiciled in Switzerland can vote in their commune of origin, or if the person has more than one commune of origin one of them can be chosen. However, nothing changes for persons who are already registered in an electoral commune.

Furthermore, in its section in the Swiss Review the federal government provides official information concerning legal matters and about upcoming elections and referendums. The Organisation for the Swiss Abroad will also publish information in the Review's main section about referendums and elections. Other sources of information include Swissinfo and the public service television and radio stations.

In addition, the procedure has been simplified: voters no longer have to renew their registration every four years. However, the electoral commune can remove persons from the electoral register if the voting material is returned three times in a row because the recipient could not be reached at the given address. **You can continue to exercise your rights as before and keep informed via the usual channels.**

- **PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

The Act specifies that personal responsibility is the basis of the federal government's relationship with Swiss citizens whose rights it guarantees and to whom it provides assistance. The federal government expects each and every citizen to exercise personal responsibility in preparing their stay or conducting business abroad. Under the FDFA's Ordinance on Fees, persons who a) disregard the recommendations of the federal government, especially the travel advice and the individual recommendations of the FDFA, b) violate the laws of the receiving state or c) lack adequate insurance cover or lose insurance cover because of a reason for exclusion, are deemed to have acted negligently.

As before, plan well, travel well. Make sure that you are properly insured and consult the travel advices of the FDFA!