



# In Touch **CH** with Switzerland

**The Newsletter of the Consulate General of Switzerland in Toronto – January 2012**

## Message by Ulrich Lehner, Ambassador of Switzerland to Canada, Ottawa

Dear compatriots,

As we enter a New Year, allow me to send you my best wishes for your health and wellbeing, for yourselves and your loved ones.

I arrived in Canada only a couple of months ago. But I have quickly learned to understand why so many of you have chosen to live in this wonderful country. It is a beautiful land, a land of many opportunities and a welcoming population.

Just as Canada, Switzerland has on the whole fared rather well during the past years of financial and economic upheavals. Furthermore, bilateral relations between our two countries are excellent. This being said, the challenges both countries face, be they the international financial stability, the creation of jobs or the cost of our health systems, are an inescapable reality.

In Switzerland, a partially renewed Federal Council has just been elected by the Federal Assembly. Amongst the changes, let me point out to the new responsibilities of Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter, who until recently was head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs and who, as of January 1<sup>st</sup> 2012, will be the new Minister of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland.

With my warmest wishes

Ulrich Lehner  
Ambassador of Switzerland to Canada

## Message by Bernadette Hunkeler Brown, Consul General of Switzerland, Toronto

Dear fellow citizens,

Already we have entered the new year! A busy 2011 has passed very quickly for us here at the Consulate General and we are all looking forward to an equally exciting and fulfilling 2012.

This newsletter will give you quite a range of information which, I hope, will interest you. Most sections also give you an internet link. Please use it and discover more information and details in the memorandum for Swiss citizen abroad, about the double tax agreement, about Sängerkfest 2012, about your platform SwissCommunity and more.

We have also included the official photo of the Federal Council 2012. Every year, this photo is taken by a different photographer and I am very proud of the fact that this year, my niece, [Corinne Glanzmann](#), was awarded this honour after going through a tough selection process.

Together with the Team of the Consulate General, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your families a happy, healthy and prosperous 2012. May the coming year treat you all well.

Bernadette Hunkeler Brown  
Consul General of Switzerland

## Consular Affairs

Amongst the 13'500 Swiss citizens registered at this Consulate General, about 180 to 220 Swiss young people celebrate their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday each year and reach - according to Swiss law – the age of majority. Consequently, these young people assume the full rights and duties of a Swiss national abroad.

The **rights** are:

- taking part in certain votes and elections in Switzerland;
- receiving the Swiss Review online or by mail;
- receiving official information about important topics and in an emergency situation by email, if desired.

The **duties** are:

- registration at this Consulate General;
- written information to this Consulate General if voting/electing in Switzerland is an option;
- written information to this Consulate General of any change of address, civil status, etc.

In January 2012, all young Swiss, born in 1994 and registered at this Consulate General will receive a letter informing them about their individual registration. If there is no personal registration within the requested 30 days, the current registration with the parents will unfortunately have to be cancelled. This might lead to complications in the future when, e.g. urgent support is needed from this Consulate General. For more information, please consult our "[Memorandum for Swiss citizen abroad](#)" and if more details are required, please do not hesitate to contact this [Consulate General](#).

If you wonder what happens to the information you provide to us, please note that it is protected by the Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection (DSG, SR 235.1), that it will not be divulged to others and it is only used for official purposes (e.g. for processing a Swiss passport). Changes, e.g. in your civil status (marriage, birth of a child, etc.), will be entered in the Consulate's database for the Swiss Abroad and forwarded to the relevant place of origin in Switzerland for updating the family register(s). It is important to keep your file up to date as an incomplete file might cause inconveniences such as a delay in issuing a Swiss travel document.

## Amendments to the double taxation agreement with Canada enter into force

**Bern, 20.12.2011 - On 16 December 2011, the Protocol of Amendment of 22 October 2010 to the double taxation agreement (DTA) between Switzerland and Canada entered into force. It contains provisions on the exchange of information in accordance with the international standard applicable at present. The Protocol of Amendment will contribute to the further positive development of bilateral economic relations.**

Aside from the exchange of information in accordance with the internationally applicable standard, Switzerland and Canada have agreed to exempt dividend payments to pension funds and the central bank from withholding tax. Interest payments between unrelated persons will also be exempt from withholding tax in the future.

Moreover, the scope of application of the withholding tax exemption for royalty payments has been extended, and an arbitration clause has been added. Finally, as a result of the Protocol of Amendment, Swiss residents in receipt of Canadian social security will see the previous double taxation of such benefits abolished.

The provisions of the Protocol of Amendment will apply from 1 January 2012. The Protocol of Amendment has been approved by parliament in both countries. ([Text of the agreement](#))

## The New-Look Federal Council

*The seven Federal Councillors are now known: Alain Berset joins the closed circle of "Seven Sages", while Micheline Calmy-Rey stands down after nine years.*

The media had been obsessed with the issue for months: who would be elected to the Federal Council on 14 December? Who would replace Micheline Calmy-Rey, and would the other six Federal Councillors be re-elected?

Speculation was rife, especially after October's federal election results: the Swiss People's Party (SVP/UDC) and the Greens both suffered a setback, whereas the Liberal Greens and Conservative Democratic Party (BDP/PBD)

made conspicuous gains in the National Council. But what really caused such excitement around the question of election to the Federal Council were the fundamental issues at stake. Should the concordance system be maintained? As standing arrangements since 1959, they had assured parties a presence in government according to their political strength in parliament. The formula would have given the SVP/UDC the right to a second seat in government. It also meant that only alliances could save the seat of BDP/PBD Minister Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf. - So this new Federal Council marks an end to the concordance. But it is, perhaps, more representative of a Switzerland which goes beyond headcounts and is more interested in the collegiality of its government. As for the allocation of government departments the only news is that Didier Burkhalter will head the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Alain Berset the Federal Department of Home Affairs.

(Source: [SwissCommunity Online Magazine – Winter](#) )



[The members of the Federal Council](#) (from left to right): Federal Councillor Johann N. Schneider-Ammann, Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter, Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer (Vice-President), President Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard, Federal Councillor Simonetta Sommaruga, Federal Councillor Alain Berset, Federal Chancellor Corina Casanova

## Sängerfest 2012 -

[Sängerfest 2012](#) is the 40th Singing and Yodeling Festival, organized by the North American Swiss Singing Alliance (NASSA). Held every three years, this spectacular event will next be held from **June 28 to July 1, 2012** in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, with visiting choirs and featured guest artists from all over Canada, the USA and Switzerland.

**Sing and Yodel Competition:** 15 choirs from Canada and the USA will compete for honors in various categories of artistic, folk and yodel music. And, the Jodlerclub Alpenrösli Einsiedeln will also be there!

**Gala Grand Concert:** An astounding 300 singers from the 15 member societies will combine their voices for the 40th Grand Concert of North American Swiss Singing Alliance. As well, many guest artists from Canada, the USA and Switzerland will be featured. As the climax of Sängerfest 2012, this is an event not to be missed!

The host member, the [Swiss Choir Thames Valley](#) , is busy preparing for this monumental event and the group is looking forward to meeting you in Kitchener-Waterloo in June 2012.

## swisscontacts.ca

[Swisscontacts.ca](#) continues to promote Swiss-related activities within our consular jurisdiction in close collaboration with our partners and the Swiss community:

- **upcoming events;** we are happy to promote events of the Swiss community
- **Blog;** send us a short review, photos, or a video clip from past events
- **Portraits;** we are happy to present Swiss artists, teachers, and more
- **facebook;** follow us and keep connected

Visit the website and help us to promote it by speaking about it to your friends and relatives. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and get your friends connected too.

## Did you know?

- 2011 will go down in Swiss history as the hottest year on record, national weather agency MeteoSwiss said in its annual weather review – details on [SwissInfo](#)
- The [Tropenhaus Frutigen](#) Fish Farm produces Switzerland's only domestic caviar. The farm is breeding 35'000 sturgeons to produce about 300 kg of "Oona" caviar, which costs up to \$ 1400 for 250 grams, each year.

## SwissCommunity – The Platform for the Swiss Abroad

The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) devised and created [SwissCommunity.org](#). Its aim is to strengthen the link between the Swiss abroad and Switzerland. The official launch of SwissCommunity took place on 21 August 2010 in St. Gallen as part of the 88th Congress of the Swiss Abroad.

SwissCommunity is a free, high-quality platform exclusively serving the Swiss who have been, are, or will be resident abroad. It is a "club" for international Switzerland, designed and tailored to meet the needs of Swiss people worldwide. Join SwissCommunity and build up your contacts and links with the Swiss diaspora and with Switzerland itself. You will also enjoy an extensive catalogue of offers and services.

### Why become a member?

- SwissCommunity is a free, high-quality online platform
- Establish contacts with Swiss nationals living around the world
- Stay in contact with your family, friends and colleagues
- Exchange information, advice and experiences with other Swiss abroad
- Keep in touch with what's happening in Switzerland
- Maintain a strong link with your home canton as well as with other cantons in Switzerland
- Participate in events organised by members of the community or create your own events
- Benefit from discounts thanks to special offers provided by SwissCommunity partners

SwissCommunity is just like you: unique! It is a global network which keeps Swiss people all over the world in touch.

## Reminder

Do not forget the link to the following website

[www.swissabroad.ch](http://www.swissabroad.ch)

where you can register your e-mail address with us and manage the way you want to receive the Swiss Review

## How to reach us

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