

Letter from Don Beyer, US Ambassador to Switzerland

From: "Beyer, Donald S" [REDACTED]
Subject: Life in Switzerland
Date: November 27, 2012 9:21:10 AM GMT+01:00
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: "Woodard, Scott" [REDACTED]

Dear Mr. Patton,

Thank you for your email about the difficult situation expat Americans are experiencing in Switzerland. Before I even arrived here three years ago, this was the biggest hassle for Americans living here, and for Swiss living in the US.

I wish I could say that we have made the situation better. At first, the resolution of the UBS case (with the transmission of 4,450 account records) helped clear the air, but it included a proviso that UBS have no new American customers here. Then the Credit Suisse et al. case, still quite unresolved, truly spooked the remaining banks.

But the crowning blow, by far, has been the passage of FATCA. The Swiss banks (among others) fear that the costs of implementation will far outweigh any possible revenues from providing services to Americans. I believe (and hope) that these fears are unwarranted, but they have certainly proven problematic.

According to Swiss newspapers, the US Dept of Treasury and the Swiss government are relatively close to a working agreement on FATCA – agreements have already been consummated with the UK, Germany, Spain, Italy, and France. When this is real, I will visit every major bank in Switzerland, from UBS to Raiffeisen to the cantonal banks, and plead with them to renew banking services to our Americans. Without a FATCA agreement, these visits would prove fruitless.

In the meantime, Migros Bank and PostFinance have proven reliable providers of routine banking services for Americans here, and Vontobel and Highmount Capital have actively pursued US clients for more sophisticated and high-end investment services.

This has been Job #1 every year -- but we are only diplomats, and not the DOJ or Treasury negotiators (nor the Swiss negotiators!)

Happy Thanksgiving -- I hope to have better news for you one day soon.

All the best,
Don Beyer
US Ambassador to Switzerland and Liechtenstein