

SwissCham Breakfast Seminar “The New Swiss Schengen Visa”

On 15 December 2008, Switzerland will issue the first Schengen visas. The new Swiss Schengen visa will facilitate travel in Europe for Chinese passport holders as it will not only allow travel in Switzerland but also in the whole Schengen area. Conversely, Chinese passport holders with a valid Schengen visa issued by other Schengen states will also be able to enter Switzerland without an additional Swiss visa. As a non-European Union (EU) member situated in the heart of Europe and completely surrounded by Schengen member states, Switzerland's integration into the Schengen area represents a natural development and a further step in its cooperation with the European Union.

On this occasion, the Swiss Chamber of Commerce in Beijing organised a breakfast seminar on the Schengen visa issue at the Hilton Hotel on 9 December 2008.

Members and non-members of the Chamber, all from diverse Swiss, Chinese and foreign companies came to listen to the Head of the Visa Section from the Embassy of Switzerland in Beijing – Mr. Hervé Findeisen. Among the 21 companies represented at the seminar we had (to mention but a few) Nestlé, Credit Suisse, Swiss Business Hub and Zurich Kantonal Bank for the Swiss ones, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Liaison Office in China and Huawei Technologies for the Chinese ones.

The seminar started with a warm welcoming from the Vice President of SwissCham Beijing – Mr Peter Troesch - who also introduced our speaker in a few words. Mr. Findeisen is from Geneva and has worked the last three years in the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an Inspector for visa anti corruption. Since July 2008, he is the Head of the Visa Section from the Embassy of Switzerland in Beijing, the second biggest visa section of Switzerland abroad. This section is formed by 14 staff who issue 90'000 visas per year.

Mr. Findeisen gave a thorough presentation on the Schengen visa procedures and regulations. The Embassy and Consulates in China issue around 120'000 visas every year. Although Switzerland is not a member of the European Union, it is part of the Schengen agreement. On the contrary, Ireland and the UK are EU members but do not issue any Schengen visas.

Main Updates

The main updates about the Swiss Schengen visa are:

- **New application form**

Downloadable on the Embassy website:

(<http://www.eda.admin.ch/etc/medialib/downloads/edactr/chn/bei.Par.0088.File.tmp/SchengenSwissVisaApplicationForm.pdf>)

- **Schengen visa sticker**

There will be a photo on the visa.

- **General requirements**

Strict photo quality regulations as required under Schengen,
2 photos per person,

Travel health insurance compulsory (with minimum coverage of 30'000 Euros or 50'000 CHF)

- **Visa fees**

All visa fees are at the same rate of 60 Euros

- **Period of stay and validity of the visa**

The validity of the visa is indicated with the exact date of allowed entry and of obligatory leave.

- **Schengen visa categories**

- Airport transit visa (A)
- Transit visa (B)
- Short stay travel visa (C)
- Longer stay visa (D)

- Residence and travel visa (D+C)
- Limited territory visa (LTV)

- **Territorial responsibility**

Where to apply for the visa? The main destination is defined by the main purpose of journey, as a second priority the longest length of stay and last the state of entry in the Schengen area.

The issue of territorial responsibility was also explained in detail.

Mr. Findeisen gave three examples of travels in Europe:

- 1) Switzerland for business - France and Italy for tourism.
- 2) Tourism: 3 days in Switzerland – 2 days in France and 2 days in Italy
- 3) Tourism: 2 days in Switzerland – 2 days in France and 2 days in Italy.

For number 1) the main destination one should write when applying for a Schengen visa is Switzerland, because the purpose of the travel is business. For number 2) it will also be Switzerland because the length of the stay is longer than for the two other countries. For number 3) as the scheduled time is of two days for all three countries, the main destination will be the country where one lands first.

- **Application Process**

The normal time to get one visa is 5 days, but it is possible to go through the 'fast track', which takes only 48 hours. Swiss companies can apply for being listed in the fast track procedure, so that their employees can receive their visa faster.

Questions and Answers

At the end of the presentation many questions were raised:

Audience (A): *We are doing business with many high ranked Chinese people in diverse companies. We have gone several times through a very unpleasant experience: once having applied for the visa Schengen, bought the plane ticket for the Chinese visitors and booked the hotel, out of ten applications three were refused by the Embassy at the last minute. This is not only a loss of face for us, but also a waste of money and gives a bad image of Switzerland. What is your view on it?*

Findeisen (F): I totally agree on the fact that it is unpleasant. We are working on it, we want to develop a good relationship with people doing business with Switzerland. But you have to know that in such cases you shouldn't hesitate to directly contact the Embassy and discuss the problem.

A: *When going to Switzerland from China, there are no direct flights. Is it possible in that case to stay a few days on a holiday in the first country we land in and then go to Switzerland for business, even if the visa has been issued from Switzerland?*

F: Yes, no problem.

A: *If a Chinese has had his or her passport issued in the south of China for example, but that this person lives now in Beijing and works in Beijing, is it necessary to apply for a Schengen visa in southern China or can it be done in Beijing?*

F: As long as you can prove that you live and work in Beijing, then it can be issued in Beijing. You should show your residence permit when applying.

A: *If I want to go to Switzerland and then to the UK, as the UK don't issue any Schengen visas, what do I do?*

F: If your first destination is Switzerland you apply for one visa for Switzerland, and then for another one for the UK.

A: *If a Chinese person has a visa of 90 days to do business in Switzerland and then finds another work in Germany, is it possible for the person to go to Germany without applying for a new visa?*

F: If the person has worked for example 1 month and wants to go to Germany for less than two months, then it is possible. But if the person wants to work for longer, then the person needs to apply for a new Schengen visa but this time in Germany.

A: *Is it possible to send someone to do the Schengen visa on behalf of someone else?*

F: Normally the applicant has to come in person to the visa section to apply for a visa. We only make exceptions for people in the diplomatic field, people working in international organisations and employees from Swiss companies.

A: *If a Chinese person has had his visa application refused, are there any chances to have it accepted another time?*

F: First, when an application is refused, the visa section will put a stamp on it. But this only means that the application has been refused. The visa section that puts the stamp has to inform the visa sections of other countries about the reasons of refusal. If the purposes are not coherent with the regulations, then we can re-examine the file as a normal file.

A: *Once the Schengen visa takes effect, what impact do you think this will have on the development of the Swiss tourism?*

F: I think there will be more and more Chinese people coming to Switzerland and that the trend of people who used to travel to the European countries and discovered Switzerland, will start coming only to Switzerland and spend their whole vacation in our country.

A: *Will there be any cooperation between the European travel agencies and the Swiss travel agencies in the future?*

F: Switzerland will accept all the travel agencies registered in the Chinese national tourism list.

A: *When applying for a language exchange or visiting a relative what changes will there be once the Schengen visa takes effect?*

F: If you want to stay longer than 90 days in Switzerland the procedures are the same than before, otherwise you can apply for a Schengen visa.

A: *If one wants to apply for a visa for medical care what is the procedure to follow?*

F: Apart from filling the registration form, you also have to prove that you have already paid the fees for the medical care, and that you have an invitation letter from the hospital where you want stay.

Mr. Findeisen thanked the people attending for the great interest they had in his presentation and was glad to be helpful. He also indicated that the updated information on the Schengen visa would be available on 10 December 2008 on the website of the Embassy:

<http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/home/rebs/asia/vchn/embbei/visa.html>

The visa Section of the Embassy of Switzerland can be reached at:

Telephone: 0086-10-85 32 87 55

Fax: 0086-10-65 32 62 10

Email: bei.visa@eda.admin.ch

The Swiss Chamber of Commerce thanks Mr. Findeisen for accepting to do this presentation and answer our questions.

SwissCham Beijing

info@bei.swisscham.org

Tel. 10 8531 0015