Dear Reader

The ambassador of an Asian country had only been in Switzerland a few weeks. She was at the main station in Zurich, taking the train to Bern, which was due to leave in just a few minutes. ‘But that’s the…!’ she exclaimed to herself, as the then President of the Swiss Confederation rushed onto the train, his tie flapping. The ambassador later related to me the two thoughts that flashed through her head at the time: ‘Firstly, does the President of Switzerland really travel by train? And secondly, the train wouldn’t have waited for the President, it would simply have left.’ In her country both these things would have been unimaginable.

People from abroad working in Switzerland are usually fascinated by the country’s political system. This fascination always gives rise to questions: How can a system function in which the electorate has so much power? Or: How does the system handle popular initiatives which at first sight seem difficult to implement? It is the task of the Federal Chancellery to answer such questions and to explain how the political system works.

Even foreign diplomats who have been in Bern for a time find it difficult to understand things which are self-evident to us, such as a president who travels by train. Foreign visitors often ask fundamental questions: ‘If the people reject an item of government business, doesn’t that spark off a state crisis?’ No, it doesn’t, because participation is an ongoing process. Each and every member of the electorate can have their say at the next popular vote.

It is also worth explaining why the political process in Switzerland moves at a different speed to other countries. In other European countries, important decisions are often made very quickly, whereas Switzerland likes to take things more slowly. Our system includes minorities (e.g. the language regions), creates balance (e.g. between urban and rural areas) and involves participation (e.g. by the people). All this takes time. But the rewards are high: stability, continuity and public acceptance of political decisions.

You have in your hands a copy of ‘A Brief Guide to the Swiss Confederation’. Each year the Federal Chancellery works with the federal departments, courts and parliament to update the information on the Swiss political system contained in this brochure. The texts, images and graphics explain how the different levels of state interact. The brochure presents the information clearly and factually and is full of surprises. Do you know who in Switzerland determines why a metre is exactly a metre long? The federal administration does – to be precise, the Swiss Federal Institute of Metrology (METAS). You can read more about its precise measurements on page 54.

I hope you enjoy reading this brochure

The Federal Chancellor, Corina Casanova
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Federal Supreme Court and the Federal Courts of first instance

You can find up-to-date and detailed information about the Swiss authorities at www.admin.ch. This site links to the Federal Council, parliament, federal administration and Federal Supreme Court websites.
As a Federal Councillor, have you ever had to support a decision taken by the whole Federal Council, even though it is not one that you adhere to? And, if so, how did you defend it?

Positions are often poles apart at the beginning of a discussion, but everyone has the opportunity to express themselves. As such, everyone’s position is taken into consideration, even if it is not accepted in its entirety. In 99.9% of cases, the Federal Council has no difficulty in defending its decision, precisely because it has worked to find the best solution and has taken into account the range of viewpoints. As a member of a collegial body, the decisions of that body have to be defended, even if they only partially reflect your own position.

You have been head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs for two years. Do you miss being at the Federal Department of Home Affairs? What do you enjoy about Foreign Affairs that you didn’t have in your work at Home Affairs?

The two departments are very different. But there is a natural logic to it, like stepping outside your home and making contact with your neighbourhood. I am not someone who looks back, and now I focus fully on the department I am currently in charge of. The FDFA is an exciting place in which to work. It is alive 24 hours a day because it operates throughout the world. I have a map in my office with arrows pointing out all the Swiss representations. It is an old map with no fancy technology, but it’s important to me because it shows that there is always some part of Switzerland at work, no matter where the sun lights up the sky. You can really sense that in this department.

What are the most memorable events you have experienced during your two years at the FDFA?

In terms of work, I’d definitely say the development of Switzerland’s relations with the European Union (EU). At a personal level, the journeys abroad, in particular to Africa and other places, for example, Colombia, where children face terrible hardship and violence. I am glad that the FDFA has the means to develop projects aimed at improving such situations.

As head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, where do you place the focus in foreign policy? What role can a small country like Switzerland play in the world?

Switzerland has a role to play. That’s undeniable. In terms of good offices, our country has a real asset in Geneva: it’s a special place where moves can be made towards peace and greater security. We want to make it easier to hold large-scale conferences in Switzerland as this tradition of dialogue is a major strength in our foreign policy. From a strategic point of view, we are focusing on relations with our neighbouring countries, with the EU, and with partners in emerging economies. And we are aware of our responsibility in facing global challenges such as climate change, immigration, and health.
Switzerland is once again very active diplomatically (negotiations with Iran, conferences on Syria). What is your role in this process?

We work as a team. The Federal Council, and in particular the head of the FDFA, mainly plays a contact role. We try to establish a network of people with whom we can discuss possibilities for cooperation directly, or we provide support in helping negotiators move towards an international political solution. The Department provides additional expertise at all levels, so that people can feel at ease here in Switzerland. I have often been told that things run smoothly in Switzerland. This allows the parties around the negotiating table to concentrate on the matters at hand.

You have decided to abandon the policy of quotas for women to achieve gender equality in the diplomatic service, and to reward excellence instead. Why?

(Smiling) If I were to introduce quotas for journalists, you wouldn’t be here now. We simply want Swiss diplomacy to achieve an excellent standard. Each year a lot of young people show an interest in pursuing a career in diplomacy, and the standards are very high. More women than men were selected in 2013 for the first time ever, as far as I am aware. Those who embark on a diplomatic career demonstrate that they want to pursue a career in the service of the Confederation and in the interests of Switzerland – that they are prepared to accept responsibility. Regardless of whether they are male or female, it is their potential that counts, and this is what we need to consider in the selection process.

In 2014 you will also chair the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Won’t this involve too much work?

It will require a great deal of organisation. The workload will certainly be very heavy, but it is an opportunity: as president of a country and chairman-in-office of the OSCE, I will have even more opportunities to form contacts with other heads of state. This could benefit both Switzerland and the OSCE.

What are Switzerland’s projects during your year as OSCE chair?

Just as has been done for my year as president, we have selected a theme: creating a security community for the benefit of everyone. We have defined about 10 specific projects, one of which involves people of your age: 57 young people from each of the OSCE countries will form a kind of ‘Youth OSCE’ and define an action plan, which I hope can be discussed at the Ministerial Council meeting to be held in Basel in December.

You mentioned how important it is for young people to be considered in the OSCE. What do you expect from us, in general?

A huge amount (smiling). Politics does not deal with only the present. Decisions made by any government have a long-term impact. They set the path for future generations. Young people are not always sufficiently aware of this; they get involved in a lot of things but have too little interest in political decisions. I expect a lot from young people, because I am convinced that they are best placed to understand the impact that the decisions that Switzerland must take in the coming months and years will have on young people’s freedom and values. In fact, I expect pretty much everything from young people, but I am also prepared to work hard for them.

Interview: Pauline Robert and Nicole Emch, International Relations students at the University of Geneva.
FROM AN ALLIANCE OF STATES TO A FEDERAL STATE

Milestones in the history of Switzerland

Switzerland was established in territorial terms by the Congress in Vienna in 1815, and in political terms by the Federal Constitution in 1848. The core of the heterogeneous Old Confederation was composed of thirteen cantons, which are still represented by the stars embossed around the edge of the five franc coin. It was during the years rife with wars and crises between 1798 and 1848 that the alliance of states evolved into a federal state. Since then, the powers of the federal government, political rights and political diversity have increased significantly.

1291 Federal Charter: the prelude
At the beginning of August in 1291, Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden entered into a charter confirmed in 1315, to keep the peace. In the course of the following centuries, the Confederation continued to grow. At the same time, it conquered or acquired subject territories. By 1513, the Confederation had expanded to include the original thirteen cantons.

1525 Reformation: denominational split
When the Reformation spread, first to Zurich in 1523, then to other areas, and finally to Geneva in 1536, the country began to be divided along religious lines. Catholic and Protestant areas increasingly grew apart and went to war against each other four times up until 1712.

1648 Peace of Westphalia: Beginning of sovereignty under international law
At the end of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48) under the Peace of Westphalia, European countries recognised the Confederation’s independence from the Holy Roman Empire and its neutrality.

1798–1803 Helvetic Republic: a centralised state with dependent cantons
A French army conquered Switzerland in 1798. The occupying French forces imposed a unitary constitution on the Helvetic Republic, which was based in theory on the principles of equality before the law, sovereignty of the people and separation of powers, but in fact on armed force. As a satellite state of France, the Helvetic Republic was forced to abandon its neutrality. Switzerland became a theatre of war.

1803 Act of Mediation: cantons become states again
On the basis of the Act of Mediation, Napoleon restored the thirteen cantons and created six new cantons in the sense of states. The Confederation then had 19 cantons, each with its own constitution and a common federal constitution.

1815 Federal Treaty: more powers for the cantons
After Napoleon was defeated by a coalition of European powers, the Confederation re-established its alliance with Valais, Neuchatel and Geneva. The Confederation then comprised 22 cantons. The Federal Treaty of 1815 devolved some of the Confederation’s authority to the cantons, while the Confederation remained responsible for security policy.

1815 Congress of Vienna: defining the borders
Switzerland’s neutrality and the inviolability of its territory were internationally recognised in 1815. Most of the currently valid national and cantonal borders were defined (with the exception of the Jura, created in 1979).

1847–48 Sonderbund War: civil war over federal reform
From 1822 on, some cantons became increasingly liberal and radical, and they disagreed with the cantons of Lucerne, Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden, Zug, Fribourg and Valais that resisted reform as to how the Confederation should be shaped. The creation of a special alliance among the seven conservative catholic cantons led to war in 1847.

1848 Federal Constitution: a federal state with democratic rights
The modern federal state was founded with the adoption of the federal constitution by the people. It provided most citizens (men) with various rights and freedoms, such as voting and election rights, freedom of the press and freedom of religion. The bicameral system, based on the American model, was introduced at federal level with the National Council and Council of States, which elected the Federal Council. Some areas were centralised. Switzerland became a single judicial and economic area.

1874 Total revision of the Federal Constitution: expansion of democratic rights
The Federal Constitution was revised in 1874 broadening the areas of responsibility of the Confederation and expanding democratic rights. It provided Swiss citizens with two additional instruments to influence policy at federal level: the referendum was introduced in 1874, and the popular initiative in 1891. In 1891 a representative of the Catholic-Conservatives (today the Christian Democratic People’s Party, CVP), Josef Zemp, was elected to the Federal Council for the first time. This represented a first step towards consensus democracy.

1914–18 World War I, the Russian Revolution: fertile ground for socialist ideas
During the First World War, the situation deteriorated for wide swathes of the population. Poverty and unemployment along with the spread of the socialist ideas after the Russian Revolution led to a nationwide general strike in 1918. The National Council was elected by proportional representation for the first time in 1919, facilitating further steps towards consensus democracy (see pages 40 and 41).

1919–45 World War II: more power for the Federal Council
Switzerland did not become involved militarily in the Second World War and was one of the few functioning democracies on the continent. Parliament granted the Federal Council powers that normally fell within the jurisdiction of parliament, and elected the first Social Democrat to the Federal Council.

1945–75 Liberal period
In 1945, a new constitution was adopted, which reduced federal powers and defined the role of the Federal Council. Women obtained the right to vote and to participate in elections at national level in 1971. In a number of communes and cantons, men and women already enjoyed equal political rights before this date.

1999 Total revision of the Federal Constitution
The totally revised Federal Constitution emphasised partnership cooperation between the Confederation and the cantons, gave precedence to federal law over conflicting cantonal law and again gave greater involvement to the communes.

2000 Popular decision on the agreement with the EU
The Swiss electorate voted in favour of the bilateral agreements between Switzerland and the European Union (EU) with a majority of 67%. The agreements entered into force in 2002/2004. They created mutual market access and provided the basis for cooperation in the areas of research, security, asylum, environment and culture.

2002 Yes to UN membership
In 2002 the people and the cantons approved Switzerland’s accession to the United Nations (UN). Since then, Switzerland has been actively involved in the United Nations as a full member.
What questions is the correspondent putting to the politician? What points is the journalist jotting down for the newspaper or news platform? Political issues are often complex. Here, for example, Finance Minister Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf is explaining the Federal Council's strategy for Switzerland's financial centre. It is the journalist's task to present this information in such a way that it can be understood by viewers and readers.

In Switzerland, freedom of the media is anchored in the Federal Constitution. A free and independent media plays a vital role in democracy. Reports and in-depth coverage of political issues and on policy shapers help to raise public awareness. For direct democracy to function, its citizens must be well informed and able to form an opinion on political issues. Voters in Switzerland are called to the polls two to three times a year to vote on specific proposals, and every four years to elect a new parliament. The media play an increasingly important channeling role in that regard, reflecting the fact that voters now tend to source their information on political affairs from the television, radio, print, and online media instead of attending election events or local assemblies.
Switzerland is a federal state: state power is divided between the federal government, cantons and communes. The cantons and communes have wide-ranging powers and their own sources of income. The cantons are always involved in decisions that affect the whole of Switzerland. Federalism unites diversity in one entity. In Switzerland, with its four linguistic cultures and huge geographical differences, it is the prerequisite for harmonious coexistence.

2396 communes
Communes are the smallest political units in Switzerland. There are currently 2396 communes, but their number is in decline as smaller communes are tending to merge together in order to carry out their tasks more efficiently. Roughly one fifth of the communes have their own parliament, especially the communes that are towns or cities. Four fifths of the communes, however, still make direct democratic decisions at the communal assembly, where all inhabitants who are entitled to vote may participate. In other words, the People are not represented by councillors, but make decisions themselves and elect the executive. In addition to the tasks that are allocated to them by the Confederation and their canton, such as managing the registry of residents or organising civil defence, the communes also have their own responsibilities, including those relating to schools, social welfare, energy supplies, road construction, local planning, taxes, etc. The communes regulate these matters to a large extent independently. The communes’ level of autonomy is determined by the individual cantons, and can therefore vary considerably from place to place.

26 cantons
The next largest political units are the states, which are known as cantons. They are the states that originally united in 1848 to form the Confederation, each relinquishing part of their sovereignty to the Confederation. Jura is an exception. It is the only canton that was created in the 20th century, when in 1979 it separated from the canton of Bern. Under the Federal Constitution, all cantons have equal rights, and in comparison with the situation in other countries, they have a high degree of independence. Health care, education and culture are among the policy areas where they enjoy a large degree of latitude. Each canton has its own constitution, and its own parliament, government and courts. The size of the parliament varies between 50 and 180 members, who are all elected by the people, in most cantons by a system of proportional representation. The cantonal governments are also all elected by the people, in most cases by majority system. Direct democracy in the form of a People’s Assembly still exists only in Appenzell Innerhoden and Glarus. In all the other cantons, the People vote exclusively at the ballot box.

1 Confederation
The Confederation is the name given to the Swiss state. CH is the abbreviation of Switzerland’s official Latin name ‘Confederatio Helvetica’. Confederatio means ‘confederation’ and Helvetica refers to the Helvetii, an ancient Celtic people who settled in the region of present-day Switzerland roughly 2000 years ago. Switzerland has evolved over the course of more than seven hundred years from the alliance of the original three cantons, Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, to today’s federal state that unites the various interests of the individual cantons with the collective interests of the country. The Confederation has responsibilities in those areas where it is granted powers by the Constitution – for example in foreign and security policy, in customs and financial matters, in enacting legislation that applies throughout the country, and in defence. Tasks that are not expressly designated federal matters are the responsibility of the next lower political unit, i.e. the cantons.

Who elects who?
In Switzerland, the People are the supreme political authority
Under the Federal Constitution, the People are the supreme political authority. The People comprise all adult men and women who hold Swiss citizenship, some 5.2 million citizens, and correspond to almost two thirds of the resident population. People under the age of 18 and foreign nationals have no political rights at federal level.

Parliament elects …
… the members of parliament: the legislature
The Swiss parliament, which is the legislative branch of the state, has two chambers: The National Council represents the Swiss population as a whole, and the Council of States represents the 26 cantons; together, they constitute the United Federal Assembly. > pages 32–37

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Parliament elects …
… the government: the executive
The Swiss government comprises the seven members of the Federal Council as well as the Federal Chancellor, who are each elected by the United Federal Assembly for a four-year term of office. > pages 38–73

The People elect …
…… the members of parliament: the legislature
The People elect the members of parliament: the legislature
… the Supreme Court: the judiciary
The supreme judicial authorities are the Federal Supreme Court in Lausanne and in Lucerne, together with its three courts of first instance: the Federal Criminal Court in Bellinzona, the Federal Administrative Court and the Federal Patent Court, both in St. Gallen. > pages 74–79

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Everyone is entitled to address written requests, suggestions and complaints to the authorities – not just those eligible to vote. The authorities in turn are required to take due note of such petitions, and although there is no law to say a response must be given, in practice every petition is considered and does receive a reply. The petition may relate to any activity of the state.

### Elections
or accumulating votes, vote-splitting and deleting names

Every four years, the People elect the 200 members of the National Council. All Swiss citizens over the age of 18 may take part in elections, both actively and passively. In other words, they may cast their votes and stand for election themselves. Federal civil servants are required to choose between their profession and elected office should they be elected.

In the cantons with more than one seat in the National Council, eligible voters have a number of options to nominate their favourite candidates: They may indicate the names of their preferred candidates in a blank list. They may use a preprinted list of candidates provided by a specific party, with or without making any changes to the list. The lists may be modified in three different ways, which may be combined:
- Firstly, names can be deleted from the list.
- Secondly, votes can be split, which means that votes are cast for members of different parties; in other words, a voter can take a name from one list and enter it on another list.
- Thirdly, candidates may be accumulated, in other words, they can be entered twice on a list. Parties themselves may also list candidates twice (but no more than twice), thus accumulating votes in advance to enhance their election prospects.

The elections to the Council of States are not regulated at federal level, but all the cantons have settled for popular elections, so that all 246 federal members of parliament are elected directly by Swiss citizens.

### Voting
or if you feel strongly about something

Those who are entitled to take part in parliamentary elections may also cast their vote in popular ballots, i.e. all Swiss citizens who have turned 18 and are not incapacitated on grounds of mental illness or debility. Eligible voters are generally called on four times a year to vote on federal proposals. On average these votes involve three to four proposals that may be adopted or rejected; although in exceptional cases, there may be more than twice that many. Votes are held on people’s initiatives and referendums:

- The mandatory referendum applies to all amendments to the Constitution and proposals for membership of specific international organisations. This means that a popular vote must be held. The acceptance of such proposals needs what is known as the double majority – the proposal must be accepted firstly by the popular majority, i.e. the majority of the valid votes cast in the whole country, and secondly by the cantonal majority, i.e. voters must accept the proposal in a majority of the cantons.

- New laws and amendments to existing laws and similar parliamentary decisions, along with certain international treaties, are subject to an optional referendum: in this case, a popular vote has to decide whether or not to support the proposal. The acceptance of proposals is therefore often described as a brake applied by the People. Referendums also contribute to political agreement because they make law the Swiss way – the People are entitled to have their say on parliamentary decisions. Federal legislation, decisions of parliament and certain international treaties are subject to an optional referendum: in this case, a popular vote is held if 50 000 citizens so request. The signatures must be collected within 100 days of publication of the new legislation. The referendum is similar to a veto and has the effect of delaying and safeguarding the political process by blocking amendments adopted by parliament or the government or delaying their effect – the referendum is therefore often described as a brake applied by the People.

### Popular initiatives
or making law the Swiss way

Citizens may request that the People decide on an amendment they want to make to the Constitution. At federal level, unlike at cantonal level, it is impossible to request a new law or an amendment to the law.

For such an initiative to come about, the signatures of 100 000 voters who support the proposal must be collected within 18 months.

A popular initiative may be formulated as a general proposal or – much more often – be presented as precisely formulated text whose wording can no longer be altered by parliament or the government. The authorities sometimes respond to an initiative with a direct counter-proposal (generally less far-reaching) in the hope that a majority of the People and cantons will support that instead. Since 1987, the possibility of a double ‘yes’ vote has existed in ballots on popular initiatives: voters may approve both the initiative and the counter-proposal. A deciding question determines which of the two texts will enter into force if both secure a popular majority and a majority of the cantons. Popular initiatives do not originate from parliament or government, but from the People. They are regarded as the driving force behind direct democracy.
WHAT POLITICAL INTERESTS ARE REPRESENTED BY WHOM OR

The four strongest political parties...

Political parties are groupings of like-minded people that have their own particular views on political, social and economic issues, etc. They act as a link between the public and state institutions and are essential in a functioning democracy. The party landscape in Switzerland is as varied as the country itself. All eleven parties give a brief portrait of themselves on the following pages.

**SVP Swiss People's Party**

- **Party President:** Toni Brunner
- **National Councillor:** Christophe Darbellay
- **Founded:** 1917
- **Party President:** 96,000 members
- **National Councillor:** 33,000 members
- **Website:** wwwsvp.ch

The Swiss People's Party emerged in 1971 from the Farm­en­council by the well­being of its weakest members’. The SP stands by this. We are committed to a society in which individuals are free to shape their lives, but in which a social net is in place to catch those at risk of falling. We want: • Secure jobs. The FDP wants everyone in Switzerland to have prospects — and this means having work. Politicians are not the ones who create jobs; this is the role of small, medium­sized and large companies. Support for the free movement of persons must go hand­in­hand with a tough but fair immigration policy, better infrastructure, and encouraging women and older people to participate in the labour market.

**FDP The Liberals**

- **Party President:** National Councillor Philipp Müller
- **National Councillor:** 201,000 members
- **Founded:** 1894; merged in 2000
- **Website:** www.fdp.ch

FDP The Liberals stand for freedom and personal re­sponsibility. Citizens should be able to shape their own lives. The state should provide a secure framework for citizens, outstanding schools and modern infrastructure. The liberal movement is re­sented in the Federal Council by Didier Burkhalter and Johann Schneider­Ammann.

**SP Swiss Social Democratic Party**

- **Party President:** National Councillor Christian Larzelere
- **National Councillor:** 33,000 members
- **Founded:** 1894; merged in 2009
- **Website:** www.spschweiz.ch

Our constitution states that ‘the strength of a people is measured by the well­being of its weakest members’. The SP stands by this. We are committed to a society in which individuals are free to shape their lives, but in which a social net is in place to catch those at risk of falling. The SP wants the economy to work for the people and not vice versa. It is not only management that contributes to a company’s success. People working in Switzerland should be able to survive on their salary. Yet social cohesion in this country is threatened by the exorbitant salaries earned by some in the top echelons. We are convinced that we would be better served if people considered others and not just themselves. Switzerland has a solid social net and good public infrastructure. The SP has made a large contribution in that respect. Without the SP there would be no old age pension, no maternity insurance and no votes for women. But that is not enough. With this clear policy based on conservative values the SVP wants to safeguard our country’s prosperity, jobs and future. While parliament re­elected SVP Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer at the Federal Council elections of 14 December 2011, it did not respect the SVP’s justified claim to two seats in the government and thereby installed a centre­left coalition. It was a missed opportunity to establish long term political stability.

**CVP Christian Democrat People’s Party**

- **Party President:** National Councillor Christophe Darbellay
- **National Councillor:** 100,000 members
- **Founded:** 1912
- **Website:** www.cvp.ch

The CVP focuses on families and middle income groups. As a business­oriented party with a liberal­social outlook it seeks to create a balance between individuals and society, personal responsibility and solidarity. Its approach to coexistence is based on a Christian view of humanity and society. The party is committed to the inter­nal and external security of the country. The CVP is represented in the Federal Council by Doris Leuthard, who holds the important position of state secretary for economic affairs, education.

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- **Website:** www.fdp.ch

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**SP Swiss Social Democratic Party**

- **Party President:** National Councillor Christian Larzelere
- **National Councillor:** 33,000 members
- **Founded:** 1894; merged in 2009
- **Website:** www.spschweiz.ch

Our constitution states that ‘the strength of a people is measured by the well­being of its weakest members’. The SP stands by this. We are committed to a society in which individuals are free to shape their lives, but in which a social net is in place to catch those at risk of falling. The SP wants the economy to work for the people and not vice versa. It is not only management that contributes to a company’s success. People working in Switzerland should be able to survive on their salary. Yet social cohesion in this country is threatened by the exorbitant salaries earned by some in the top echelons. We are convinced that we would be better served if people considered others and not just themselves. Switzerland has a solid social net and good public infrastructure. The SP has made a large contribution in that respect. Without the SP there would be no old age pension, no maternity insurance and no votes for women. But that is not enough. With this clear policy based on conservative values the SVP wants to safeguard our country’s prosperity, jobs and future. While parliament re­elected SVP Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer at the Federal Council elections of 14 December 2011, it did not respect the SVP’s justified claim to two seats in the government and thereby installed a centre­left coalition. It was a missed opportunity to establish long term political stability.

**CVP Christian Democrat People’s Party**

- **Party President:** National Councillor Christophe Darbellay
- **National Councillor:** 100,000 members
- **Founded:** 1912
- **Website:** www.cvp.ch

The CVP focuses on families and middle income groups. As a business­oriented party with a liberal­social outlook it seeks to create a balance between individuals and society, personal responsibility and solidarity. Its approach to coexistence is based on a Christian view of humanity and society. The party is committed to the inter­nal and external security of the country. The CVP is represented in the Federal Council by Doris Leuthard, who holds the important position of state secretary for economic affairs, education.

**FDP The Liberals**

- **Party President:** National Councillor Philipp Müller
- **National Councillor:** 201,000 members
- **Founded:** 1894; merged in 2000
- **Website:** www.fdp.ch

FDP The Liberals stand for freedom and personal re­sponsibility. Citizens should be able to shape their own lives. The state should provide a secure framework for citizens, outstanding schools and modern infrastructure. The liberal movement is re­sented in the Federal Council by Didier Burkhalter and Johann Schneider­Ammann.

**SP Swiss Social Democratic Party**

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...and the seven other political parties in parliament

**The Greens**
swiss Green Party

- Party President:     6 500 members www.gruene.ch
- Co-Presidents: National Councillors    7 500 members www.gruene.ch
- Founded in 2007

The Greens are the fifth largest party in parliament. The party has sections in 25 of the 26 cantons, and holds seats in ten cantonal governments and in local government in numerous towns and communes. Our party wants to see natural resources being used responsibly, an improvement in living quality and for Switzerland to embrace relations with other countries. The Greens strive to find long-term solutions and focus on quality and diversity. Our current priorities include developing a green economy to preserve resources and introducing energy solutions which allow us to phase out nuclear power rapidly and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels.

**glp**
Swiss Green Liberal Party

- Party President:    3 800 members www.gru.un.ch
- Founded in 1983

A well-preserved environment is the very basis of our existence. We want to preserve a thriving world free of contaminated land so that future generations can also enjoy life. This includes healthy state finances and social institutions. The state should not accumulate debt but instead concentrate on its core activities. Sensible conditions allow the market to function effectively. Personal initiative, entrepreneurship, a sense of responsibility and solidarity are the cornerstones of a liberal society and should be encouraged, as should a high quality education system.

**EVP**
Swiss Evangelical People’s Party

- Party President:    4 600 members www.evhp.ch
- Founded in 1919

The EVP is a dependable political force, which has been committed to a Switzerland worth living in since 1919. Based on Christian values such as responsibility, justice and perseverance, the EVP’s practical and solution-oriented policies for the benefit of all people are in the middle of the political spectrum. The party has about 40 representatives in the cantonal parliaments. The EVP wants to support families, preserve God’s creation, reduce debt and secure social services. It calls for an economy that deals fairly with resources and manpower, solidarity with disadvantaged people and protection of human life.

**BDP**
Conservative Democratic Party

- Party President:    5 500 members www.bdp.info
- Founded in 2008

The BDP was among the winners of the federal elections of October 2011, immediately securing a 5.4 per cent share of the National Council of States. The BDP is the youngest Federal Council party and is represented in the national government by Regula Rytz and the seven other political parties in parliament

**CSP Obwalden**
Christian Social Party Obwalden

- Party President:    250 members www.csp-ow.ch
- Founded in 1956

The CSP Obwalden is only active at cantonal level. It has no affiliations at the national level and has been represented in the cantonal government since it was founded. The party is represented in most communal councils in Obwalden and the mayor of Sarnen is also a member of the CSP. With 8 seats, the CSP Obwalden forms its own parliamentary group in the cantonal parliament. It is represented in all cantonal courts. Its policies are in line with the principles of Christian social ethics and it places importance on a strong economy, genuine solidarity with the weakest in society and the conservation of the environment.

**Lega**
Lega dei Ticinesi

- Party President:    1 500 members www.lega-dei-ticinesi.ch
- Founded in 1991

We want an independent, sovereign Switzerland. It is for that reason that we founded the Citizen’s Movement of French-speaking Switzerland and the umbrella organisation, the Federation of Citizen’s Movements of the Alpine Region.
It is the Swiss national holiday, and so open day at the Federal Palace. Everyone is welcome and a lot of people have come to Bern to take a look around the parliament building. On 1 August the presidents of the two parliamentary chambers are traditionally present to answer the visiting public’s questions. In 2013 these were Maya Graf, President of the National Council and Filippo Lombardi, President of the Council of States. The two presidents will also be present in the Federal Palace on this year’s national day. The questions the public are keen to ask must be taken seriously by the politicians. After all, parliament is ultimately answerable to the electorate. We regularly have the opportunity to say whether or not we agree with the decisions made by the legislature. If politicians are too out of touch with the public’s concerns, they will soon find out. In the National Council chamber, all members should be able to understand what others are saying. If you look closely you can see that some people are wearing headphones. Unlike in the Council of States, the debates here are simultaneously interpreted into the other official languages.
THE ELECTION OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT OR

The two ways into parliament

Switzerland has a bicameral parliament: the Federal Chambers, which together constitute the United Federal Assembly. The National Council represents the overall population and the Council of States, the cantons. This system reflects the two principles on which the structure of the state is founded: the democratic principle, according to which every vote carries the same weight and the federalist principle, by which all cantons are treated equally. Both chambers are elected directly by the People: the National Council according to standard federal rules, the Council of States according to regulations which vary from canton to canton.

The National Council represents the people

The large chamber has 200 seats. The number of deputies from a canton depends on the size of its population: for every 40,000 inhabitants or so, there is one member on the National Council. However, because the Federal Constitution guarantees one seat per canton, Appenzell Innerrhoden, which has just 16,000 inhabitants, also sends a People’s representative to the Federal Palace. Similarly, the neighbouring canton of Appenzell Ausserrhoden and the cantons of Obwalden and Nidwalden, Uri and Glarus only send one National Council member each, whereas the highly populated canton of Zurich currently has 34 seats.

National Council elections are elections by proportional representation

Elections to the National Council have been carried out according to the system of proportional representation since 1919: the seats are distributed among the political parties in proportion to the share of votes cast. It is only subsequently that the candidates with the most votes are allocated the seats their political party has won. The system of proportional representation also allows smaller political parties to gain representation in parliament.

The Council of States represents the cantons

The small chamber has 46 seats. Irrespective of its population, each canton sends two deputies to the Council of States, with the exception of the six former half-cantons Obwalden, Nidwalden, Basel-Stadt, Basel-Landschaft, Appenzell Ausserrhoden and Appenzell Innerrhoden, which only have one member each. This means that Zurich with nearly 1.4 million inhabitants elects two deputies to the Council of States as does canton Uri with around 36,000 inhabitants.

Council of States elections are a majority vote

With the exception of the cantons of Jura and Neuchâtel, elections to the Council of States are held in all cantons according to the first-past-the-post system. The seats are distributed according to the principle of majority voting. The person or two persons with the most votes in their canton are elected. This procedure favours large parties and leading figures.

Elections every four years

Once the legislature period, which is parliament’s term of office, is completed, general elections are held. The legislature period for the National Council lasts four years. The Council of States does not hold general elections and therefore has no legislature period. Eligible voters elect the members of the Council of States according to cantonal law.
They represent the people

The National Council, the ‘large chamber’, comprises 200 members. It represents Switzerland’s 8 million residents. The number of seats allocated to an individual canton depends on its population. The rule is that every canton is entitled to at least one seat.
They represent the 26 cantons

The members of the Federal Council

The Council of States, the ‘small chamber’, is made up of 46 representatives of the cantons. The six cantons of Obwalden, Nidwalden, Basel-Stadt, Basel-Landschaft, Appenzell Ausserrhoden and Appenzell Innerrhoden each elect one representative to the Council of States, while the other 20 cantons each have two.

Cooperation between the National Council and the Council of States

Procedure for resolving differences

The National Council and Council of States are regarded as equal: all political business is considered by both chambers. The Council presidents decide in each case which chamber will be first to deal with an item of business (the first chamber). If the two Councils reach different decisions, a procedure for resolving differences is applied. If there are still differences after three debates in each Council, a conciliation committee is appointed to seek a compromise solution.

United Federal Assembly

The National Council and Council of States join to form the United Federal Assembly in order to elect the Federal Council, the Federal Chancellor and the judges of the Federal Supreme Court; and to decide on pardons and conflicts of jurisdiction between the highest federal authorities. These sessions are held in the National Council chamber. On these occasions, the members of the Council of States take up seats along the rear wall of the chamber.

Extraordinary session

An extraordinary session is held when the Federal Assembly has to be convened to deal with an urgent matter. An extraordinary session may be convened by a quarter of the members of either Council or the Federal Council. This right also permits a political minority to have a say in setting the political agenda.

You can find detailed information on the Swiss Parliament at:

www.parlament.ch
www.juniorparl.ch
www.civica.mp.ch
What ‘our people in Bern’ are doing

The members of the National Council and the Council of States each have a series of more or less effective instruments to assert their opinion or to pass on that of their electors. They can initiate legislative amendments, ask the Federal Council critical questions or assign it work to do.

Frequency and duration of parliamentary sessions

The National Council and the Council of States usually meet for an ordinary three-week session in spring, summer, autumn and winter. Committee meetings are held between sessions.

Militia system: Part-time politicians

The 246 members of the National Council and the Council of States devote a large part of their working hours to their parliamentary duties. Generally, they also have another job. This arrangement where representatives take on public tasks and mandates on a part-time basis is known in Switzerland as the militia system. The representatives’ double workload regularly gives rise to calls for a full-time parliament. On the other hand, some say that part-time members of parliament are closer to the People and that their professional knowledge is a valuable contribution to political debates.

The main tasks

Legislation: The National Council and the Council of States constitute the legislature, which is the legislative power in Switzerland. The two chambers, together referred to as the Federal Assembly, debate all constitutional amendments before they are put to the popular vote. In addition, they prepare, amend or repeal federal acts, draw up federal decrees and approve international treaties.

Elections: The two parliamentary chambers sit together as the United Federal Assembly in order to elect the members of the Federal Council, the Federal Chancellor and the judges to the federal courts. Each year during the winter session, it elects the President and Vice-President of the Swiss Confederation from among the seven members of the Federal Council. The United Federal Assembly also elects the Attorney General of Switzerland and the deputy Attorneys General of Switzerland. In the event of a military threat to the country, the United Federal Assembly also appoints a General as commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Control: The Federal Assembly is responsible for the overall supervision of the federal administration; it decides, among other things, on the federal government’s budget – the level of revenues and expenditure. It also examines and approves the federal accounts.

Instruments

By making a proposal, members can make amendments to pending issues under discussion.

Parliamentary initiatives enable a member to submit a draft bill for an act or to propose in general terms that such a text be drafted.

A motion obliges the Federal Council to submit a specific draft bill or decree or to take appropriate measures. A motion requires the approval of both chambers.

A postulate is a form of request requiring the Federal Council to examine and report on whether an act or decree needs to be drafted or if other measures need to be taken. A postulate is binding once it is approved by one of the two chambers.

An interpellation enables members of the Federal Assembly to request information on important events or matters relating to foreign or domestic policy affecting the Confederation. A debate can be requested on the response given by the Federal Council.

An ordinary question, in the same way as an interpellation, enables members to request information on important events or matters relating to foreign or domestic policy affecting the Confederation. However, contrary to interpellations, ordinary questions are not put before the Federal Council, but are answered in writing by the Federal Council.

Question time is a procedure used only by the National Council to deal with current issues. During question time, members of the Federal Council appear before the National Council to respond to questions from Council members. Question time, which lasts no longer than 90 minutes, takes place at the beginning of the second and third weeks of sessions.
Laying the groundwork

Committees are responsible for preparing items of business and formulating recommendations for their respective Council. The committees also monitor social and political developments, and make proposals as to how problems could be solved and future challenges tackled.

Members of parliament are also committee members

Both the National Council and the Council of States have standing committees: two supervisory committees and nine legislative committees.

Their composition depends on the strength of the parliamentary groups. National languages and national regions are, as far as possible, taken into due consideration. A National Council committee has 25 members and a Council of States committee has 13. Thus, a member of the National Council sits on one or two committees and a member of the Council of States on three or four.

The term of office for committee members is four years with the option of being re-elected. The term of office for committee chairpersons is limited to two years.

Setting the course behind closed doors

In contrast to National Council and Council of States sessions, committee meetings are not public. The in camera consultations usually foster an open discussion between members, making it easier to find mutual solutions. The committees then brief the media after their meetings.

Members whose motions have not been carried in the committee can subsequently submit minority proposals at the plenary session. The council tends to accept their own committees’ proposals; key decisions on the course to be followed are therefore taken in the committees.

Supervisory committees and delegations

The Finance Committees (FC) monitor the federal government’s spending, review the federal government’s budget and public accounts, and examine proposals for future spending. They are divided into sub-committees that scrutinize the finances of the seven departments. The Finance Delegation, made up of three National Council representatives and three Council of States representatives, continually monitors and supervises the federal government’s finances.

The NFLA Supervisory Delegation carries out overall parliamentary supervision of the construction of the New Rail Link through the Alps (NRLA).

The Control Committees (CC) exercise overall parliamentary supervision. Their tasks include carrying out inspections and visiting agencies. The control committees are divided into sub-committees. In addition, each committee selects three members from its group to form the Control Delegation (CDel) whose task it is to scrutinize activities relating to national security and the intelligence services.

The Legal Affairs Committees (LC): civil code, code of obligations, intellectual property, fair trading, data protection, criminal law, military criminal law, parliamentary immunity, amnesty.

Legislative committees

Foreign Affairs Committees (FAC): international relations, neutrality, humanitarian aid, human rights, foreign economic policy, European integration, World Bank, IMF.

Science, Education and Culture Committees (SECC): science, education, genetic engineering, languages, culture, sport, family, youth and equality issues.

Social Security and Health Committees (SSHC): social insurance, health matters, drugs, food, sickness and accident prevention, health and safety in the workplace.

Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy Committees (ESPEC): environment protection, national heritage, spatial planning, water supply and regulation, energy, forestry, hunting and fishing.

Security Policy Committees (SPC): military defence, civil defence, national economic supply, peace and security policy, civilian service, war materiel exports.

Transport and Telecommunications Committees (TTC): transport and traffic, postal services and telecommunications, media.

Economic Affairs and Taxation Committees (EATC): national economy, labour, social partnership, prices, consumer protection, private insurance, export risk guarantees, taxation, agriculture.

Political Institutions Committees (PIC): federal authorities, relations between the Confederation and the cantons, political rights, citizenship, foreign nationals, asylum, relations between the Church and the State.

Legal Affairs Committees (LAC): civil code, code of obligations, intellectual property, fair trading, data protection, criminal law, military criminal law, parliamentary immunity, amnesty.

Other committees

The Pardons and Jurisdiction Committee (PO) receives applications for pardons concerning sentences handed down by the Federal Criminal Court or a federal administrative authority, as well as for military criminal cases taken to the Federal Court.

The Judiciary Committee (JC) is responsible for the preparation of the election and the removal from office of members of the federal courts.

Applications to repeal immunity for Council members and for government officials elected by the Federal Assembly are dealt with by the Immunity Committee (IC-N) in the National Council and by the Legal Affairs Committee in the Council of States.

The Drafting Committee (CD) reviews the wording of legislation in the three official languages and decides on their final version.

The Legislature Plan Committees (LPC) are special committees that examine the draft of the Federal Council on the legislation plan for their Councils.

Delegations

Delegations are mainly called on to cultivate relations with other states; otherwise, they represent the Federal Assembly in international parliamentary assemblies such as the Council of Europe, La Francophonie, the OSCE or NATO.

For current and detailed information on the committees and delegations go to: www.parlament.ch > Bodies and council members
Taking a common stance

Parliamentary groups

They comprise members of the same party or parties sharing similar political sympathies. They play an important role in opinion-forming processes, discussing important council business and seek to agree on a line that can be followed by Council members in their dealings with the media and the public. At least five members from the same council are needed to form a parliamentary group. In the National Council, members must belong to a parliamentary group in order to be eligible to sit on a committee.

This is why parties with fewer than five members are keen to join a parliamentary group. But they are also courted because the more members a parliamentary group has, the more committees it can sit on and the greater its influence on council business.

Politically speaking, the Federal Assembly is not divided into parties, but into parliamentary groups.

In word and deed

General Secretariat

When a new member of parliament takes up office in the Federal Assembly it is similar to starting a new job: new Council members have many questions, are inundated with information, and are expected to hit the ground running, but first have to become acquainted with how parliament works. At the start of a new legislature period the Parliamentary Services therefore have their work cut out. But even at other times, the 300 or so staff who share 212 full-time positions, support the work done by lawmakers year in, year out, whether in the spotlight or quietly in the background.

The work of the Federal Assembly is most visible when parliament is in session. Debates are recorded in the Official Bulletin, which is produced while the sitting is in progress; individual speeches are available to read around an hour later at www.parlament.ch. But before an item of business even makes it to the chamber for debate, it is first examined by the relevant committee. The meetings of the various committees are prepared in terms of content and organisation by the respective committee secretariats, and in practical terms by the tram of ushers. To allow committee members to familiarise themselves with the wide range of topics and fields, they are provided with documentation, such as reports produced by federal offices, newspaper or journal articles and minutes from earlier meetings. Council members can also request personalised documentation packs and advice for more in-depth information, or to help prepare for visits at home and abroad.

Information online and in all official languages

Council members can find most of the documentation they need on the intranet. Each member of parliament receives a laptop, if requested, or at least the relevant codes to be able to log in to parliament’s system. A team of IT staff and web specialists is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the entire IT infrastructure at the Parliamentary Services and the secretariats of the parliamentary groups. The parliament website also has to be kept up to date so that the public can find out about items of business, members of parliament or events. During the sessions, debates are streamed live via internet.

Council members speak before parliament and in committee meetings in their own language. During sessions in the National Council, interpreters provide simultaneous translation of statements in the three official languages of German, French and Italian. Translations of most documents are also available.

Contacts outside and within the Federal Palace

The work performed by parliament does not only take place within the Federal Palace: there are numerous contacts with journalists and the public, as well as with foreign parliaments. Here too, the Parliamentary Services provide Council members with the support they need. Press releases are drafted, media conferences are organised, and arrangements are made for trips by Swiss delegations abroad and for visits by foreign delegations to Switzerland.

The public can follow the work of their representatives in parliament through the media or online, but also in person from the viewing gallery. Council members receive individual visitors or groups in the Federal Palace, and visitors can find out about parliament by taking a guided tour.

A large number of people from quite different walks of life pass through the doors of the Federal Palace: Council members, representatives of different interest groups and the media, civil servants and visitors. An open house like this requires certain security measures and the presence of security staff. The building also has to be looked after. The activities that take centre stage would not be possible without all the work done behind the scenes. Work would soon grind to a halt if the wastepaper baskets were overflowing, if there was no heating in winter or if Council members weren’t able to get a coffee...
The total revision of the CO₂ Act

Bringing in new legislation is a complex and at times protracted business. The process takes at least twelve months, but it has been known to take as long as ten years or more. In the following example, it took five years for an existing law to be replaced by a new one.

The total revision of the 1999 CO₂ Act was begun in 2008. The revised law came into force at the beginning of 2013. Under the new law, CO₂ emissions must be reduced by at least 20% compared to 1990 levels by 2020. Favour of the first alternative, whereby emissions reduction is achieved mainly through measures taken in Switzerland. The FOEN drafts a draft on Swiss climate policy after 2012. On the one hand, the draft lays out the ‘healthy climate’ popular initiative and recommends that it be rejected; on the other, it outlines the draft developed as an indirect counter-proposal to amend the CO₂ Act.

The Federal Council commissions DETEC to conduct consultation proceedings on the draft revision of the CO₂ Act. The draft revision provides for two alternatives: the first places emphasis on domestic measures, and the second focuses on compensating domestic emissions by purchasing certificates abroad. During the consultation proceedings, the cantons, federal courts, political parties, business federations and other organisations are all able to submit their comments on the draft and propose amendments.

At the same time, the Federal Council rejects the ‘healthy climate’ popular initiative because it could prove to be too rigid both in terms of both domestic and foreign policy. The Federal Council therefore intends to submit the revised CO₂ Act to the Federal Assembly as an indirect counter-proposal to the popular initiative.

The Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy Committee of the National Council (CESPE-S) accepts the Federal Council’s proposal for the most part. Contrary to the National Council’s decision, it favours a reduction goal of 20% through the partial purchase of foreign certificates.

The Council of States considers the proposal for a total revision of the act and holds a consultation where each article of the draft is discussed separately. It accepts the proposals of its advisory committee for the most part and adopts the draft amendment on 8 March 2011. Since this version does not correspond with the National Council’s version on all points, the chambers proceed to the resolution of differences.

During the resolution of differences, the item of business is again submitted first of all to the National Council, which at this point focuses only on the provisions still under debate. The item of business is then sent to the Council of States, which, as second chamber, addresses the remaining differences before it is sent back to the National Council. Following the third discussion of each individual article, the National Council adopts the amendments proposed by the Council of States.

In the final vote on 23 December 2011, both chambers adopt the draft of the total revision of the CO₂ Act.

The committee withdraws the ‘healthy climate’ initiative on condition that no referendum is held against the total revision of the CO₂ Act. No referendum is requested; the popular initiative is withdrawn and so no popular vote is held.

The referendum period for the revised CO₂ Act expires without having been used. The healthy climate initiative is therefore withdrawn. The revised CO₂ Act takes effect from 1 January 2013.
The Swiss government

The seven members of the cabinet and the Federal Chancellor are posing for this year’s official Federal Council photograph in their chamber. The heavy 19th century furniture has been moved aside. It is in this stately room in the west wing of the Federal Palace that the members of the Federal Council and the Federal Chancellor meet each week to take decisions that affect the country and its population. They deal with 2000 to 2500 items of business each year on issues such as health, transport policy, migration or security matters. Details of the discussions and the decisions taken are not made public. Discretion and security remain a top priority during the meeting. Mobile phones are prohibited and the computer used by the Vice Chancellor to record decisions has no internet connection. However, once the meetings are over, the principle of freedom of information again applies. The Federal Council generally holds a press conference the same day. In the media centre across the road from the west wing of the Federal Palace, members of the Federal Council provide detailed information about the decisions taken and are available to answer journalists’ questions.
The Federal Council

The Swiss government comprises the seven members of the Federal Council, who are elected individually by the United Federal Assembly for a four-year term of office. The president is elected for one year only and is regarded when in office as ‘primus inter pares’, or first among equals. He chairs the sessions of the Federal Council and undertakes special ceremonial duties. The Federal Chancellor acts as the government’s chief of staff.

Collegiality

The Federal Constitution stipulates that ‘the Federal Council takes decisions as a collegial body’. Each federal councillor has equal rights as a member of the collegial body. The President of the Swiss Confederation chairs the sessions, but has no more rights than the other members. Decisions are made together. As a rule, the Federal Council avoids putting matters to a vote, as it is normally clear from the discussion what the majority view is. Once a decision is made, members of the Federal Council must remain unanimous when presenting it to the public, even if it is contrary to their personal view or to the position of their party.

Consensus

Switzerland’s culture of consensus corresponds to the belief that decisions are only lasting if they are supported not only by the majority, but also by the minority. Important decisions should be made by consensus, which is why the various parties and language regions are included at government level. The seven members of the Federal Council belong to five different parties and hail from cantons in the German- and French-speaking parts of Switzerland. A woman was elected to the Federal Council for the first time in 1984. Today there are four men and three women.

From one-party to multi-party government

Switzerland has not always had a multi-party government. After the founding of the federal state in 1848, the Federal Council consisted entirely of members of the Free Democratic Party for 43 years. The first Catholic-Conservative (today’s CVP) member joined the government in 1899, followed by a second in 1919. In 1899, the Federal Assembly elected a member of the Farmers’, Trades’ and Citizens’ Party (today’s SP) to the Federal Council. In 1943, during the Second World War, the Social Democratic Party was also brought into the government. In 1959, the four parties agreed to form a government with two Free Democrats, two Christian Democrats, two Social Democrats and one member of the Swiss People’s Party (also known as the ‘magic formula’ 2:2:2:1). This constellation remained unchanged for 44 years. Then, in the 2003 Federal Council elections, the SP won a seat from the CVP. In 2008, however, the two SP representatives Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf and Samuel Schmid shifted their allegiance to the newly created BDP (Conservative Democratic Party). Since Samuel Schmid stepped down in 2009, the SP has again had one seat in the Federal Council, held by Ueli Maurer. Since then, the formula has been: 2:2:1:1:1 (2 SP, 2 FDP, 1 CVP, 1 BDP, 1 SVP).

Role of the Federal Council

As the highest executive authority of the country, the Federal Council is primarily responsible for the activities of the government. It must continuously

- assess the situation arising from developments in the state and society and from events at home and abroad;
- define the fundamental goals of state action and determine the resources needed to attain them;
- plan and co-ordinate government policy and ensure its implemention;
- represent the Swiss Confederation at home and abroad.

Furthermore, the Federal Council must regularly and systematically scrutinise the workings of the federal administration in order to ensure its efficiency and the legality and practicality of its activities. The Federal Council also takes part in the legislative procedure by

- leading the preliminary proceedings of legislation;
- submitting federal acts and decrees to the Federal Assembly;
- enacting ordinances in so far as the Federal Constitution or federal law empowers it to do so.

Finally, the Federal Council drafts the budget and the state accounts.

The Federal Council generally meets for one ordinary session each week and takes decisions on some 2000 to 2500 matters each year. In addition to extraordinary sessions, which are convened at short notice as and when the need arises, a number of special meetings are also held each year, which are dedicated to the consideration of especially complex and important issues. The sessions of the Federal Council are chaired by the President of the Swiss Confederation, or in his absence, by the Vice President. They can last between three and six hours. The departments and the Federal Chancellery prepare the agenda, but it is the Federal Council that takes the decisions as a collegial body. Each member of the Federal Council has one vote. The Federal Chancellor is entitled to propose motions and speak, but has no vote.

The composition of the Federal Council according to political party since 1848

1848: 6 CVP, 1 SVP
1852: 5 CVP, 1 FDP
1856: 4 CVP, 2 SVP
1860: 3 CVP, 3 SVP
1864: 2 CVP, 4 SVP
1868: 1 CVP, 5 SVP
1872: 1 CVP, 6 SVP
1876: 1 CVP, 6 SVP
1880: 1 CVP, 6 SVP
1884: 1 CVP, 6 SVP
1888: 1 CVP, 6 SVP
1891: 1 CVP, 6 SVP
1895: 1 CVP, 6 SVP
1899: 2 CVP, 5 SVP
1903: 2 CVP, 5 SVP
1907: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1911: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1915: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1919: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1923: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1927: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1931: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1935: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1939: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1943: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1947: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1951: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1955: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1959: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1963: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1967: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1971: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1975: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1979: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1983: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1987: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1991: 3 CVP, 4 SVP
1995: 4 CVP, 3 SVP
1999: 4 CVP, 3 SVP
2003: 4 CVP, 3 SVP
2007: 4 CVP, 3 SVP
2011: 4 CVP, 3 SVP
2015: 4 CVP, 3 SVP
2019: 4 CVP, 3 SVP
2023: 4 CVP, 3 SVP
* Swiss Liberal Party

First woman elected to the Federal Council: Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf. She was elected in 2008.

The seven members of the Federal Council

Didier Burkhalter
President of the Swiss Confederation
Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
Member of the FDP Federal Councillor since 2009

Simonetta Sommaruga
Vice-President of the Federal Council
Head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police
Member of the SP Federal Councillor since 2010

Didier Burkhalter
Head of the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications
Member of the CVP Federal Councillor since 2006

Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf
Head of the Federal Department of Finance
Member of the BDP Federal Councillor since 2008

Johann N. Schneider-Ammann
Head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research
Member of the FDP Federal Councillor since 2010

Alain Berset
Head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs
Member of the SP Federal Councillor since 2012

Corina Casanova
Federal Chancellor since 2008

The Swiss government comprises the seven members of the Federal Council, who are elected individually by the United Federal Assembly for a four-year term of office. The president is elected for one year only and is regarded when in office as ‘primus inter pares’, or first among equals. He chairs the sessions of the Federal Council and undertakes special ceremonial duties. The Federal Chancellor acts as the government’s chief of staff.
The Federal Chancellery is headed by Federal Chancellor Corina Casanova, who is elected by parliament in the same way as the members of the Federal Council. She has a say in government affairs and can make proposals on matters relating to her field of business. The Federal Chancellery is supported in her work by vicechancellors André Simonazzi and Thomas Helbing, and about 250 employees.

Coordination and monitoring of democratic rights

The Swiss people are called to vote on important political issues three or four times a year. They elect a new parliament every four years. It is the job of the Federal Chancellery to ensure that the electoral process runs smoothly. The Chancellery makes sure that the cantons and communities organise the vote properly. And if parties, organisations, political groups or individuals have a political concern, i.e. they would like something in Switzerland to be changed, the Federal Chancellery is the right place to turn to. Here they receive advice as to the best way to proceed, or what they need to pay attention to when submitting an initiative or launching a referendum.

Vote électronique: a joint project

For now, most Swiss people have two ways of casting their vote: they can either send it by post or drop it in the ballot box in their commune. In future, people will also be able to vote electronically. The Federal Chancellery is working closely with the cantons to implement the ‘Vote électronique’ project. ‘Security before speed’ is the motto of this complex and long-term project. Following a series of successful pilot projects in three cantons, half of the cantons have been participating in e-voting trials since 2010. An average of around 150,000 voters, primarily Swiss people living abroad, can now vote electronically. In the next phase of the project, pilot projects will be extended to eligible voters residing in Switzerland. The Federal Chancellery is also exploring the options of digitalising additional instruments of direct democracy in the future, such as collecting signatures for initiatives and referendums.

Planning for the Federal Council

The Federal Council deals with between 2000 and 2500 items of government business every year, which are brought together in a four-year legislative plan which serves as a basis for defining the annual objectives. In its annual report, the Federal Council reports to parliament on whether it has achieved its objectives. The planning process is conducted by the Federal Chancellery together with the departments. The Federal Chancellery also coordinates long-term planning. The challenges facing Switzerland in the years to come are outlined in the Outlook 2025 report.

Overseeing items of business from draft stage to decision

Federal Council meetings normally take place in the Federal Council Chamber in the west wing of the Federal Palace every Wednesday (Fridays when parliament is in session), starting at 9 o’clock sharp. They generally last between three and six hours. Before an item of business reaches the Federal Councillors, it goes through a series of stages which are overseen by the Federal Chancellery. When a draft proposal submitted by a department has gone through the office consultation procedure, the head of department responsible signs the final proposal. His or her fellow Federal Councillors are then given the opportunity to submit their views on it in a joint reporting procedure. Not until this procedure is complete and the Federal Chancellery has ensured that the item of business is formally and legally correct can it be put on the agenda for a Federal Council meeting.

Communication of Federal Council decisions

Immediately after a Federal Council meeting, Vice Chancellor and Federal Council Spokesperson André Simonazzi informs parliament and the public of the most important decisions taken during the session. He comments on the decisions together with a member of the Federal Council or an expert on the subject. The press conference can be followed live at www.tv.admin.ch.

Vice Chancellor Thomas Helbing in turn ensures that all seven departments are informed in detail and in writing about the Federal Council decisions. The Federal Council decisions and reports are published in the Federal Gazette in the three official languages. The new or amended acts and ordinances are published weekly in the Official Compilation of Federal Legislation. The Classified Compilation of Federal Legislation is continuously updated. It provides a complete overview of current law, and is an essential tool for both lawyers and many private individuals.

Texts in German, French and Italian

A multilingual country such as Switzerland requires that all its laws and important parliamentary, government and administrative texts be available in the three official languages. The Central Language Services at the Federal Chancellery ensure that laws, ordinances and treaties are formulated as clearly as possible in German, French and Italian. Many federal government and administrative texts are also translated into Roman and English. The Language Services of the Federal Chancellery are active both nationally and internationally. In 2013/2014, they will chair the Conference of Translation Services of European States (COTSOES) for the second time. Thirty-six government translation, terminology and interpretation services from 17 different European countries are members of COTSOES, which promotes the exchange of information and cooperation among member services.

Cross-unit cooperation and automatic archiving

All employees of the Federal Chancellery work with an electronic records and process management system, which facilitates cross-unit cooperation and automatically archiving important documents. The system also allows recurring procedures to be initiated and executed according to predefined processes.

Under the leadership of Hans-Rudolf Wenger, the Internal Services ensure that the wheels of the Federal Chancellery keep on turning smoothly. The primary tasks of Internal Services include human resources, finance and accounting, logistics, electronic records and process management, information technology, usher service, events management at the von Wattenwyl Haus and the Lohn country residence, and the authentication of signatures for foreign authorities.

Publications on federal votes and elections

Three or four weeks before a popular vote is held, the five million eligible voters receive a pamphlet setting out the proposals submitted to the popular vote in a concise and easily understandable manner. A working group led by the Federal Council Spokesperson prepares this information in conjunction with the relevant department. The Federal Council discusses and approves the information. The pamphlet is very much appreciated with about 70 per cent of voters using it as a source of information. When elections to the National Council are held every four years, the Federal Chancellery publishes a brochure explaining the voting procedure and aspects of the Swiss political system. In addition, the Federal Chancellery also manages several federal websites: www.admin.ch, www.bundesrat.admin.ch, www.news.admin.ch and the Swiss portal www.ch.ch.

Käfigturm: a forum for political ideas

In their efforts to make the world of politics accessible to as many citizens as possible, the Federal Chancellery and Parliamentary Services run a political forum in the Käfigturm (prison tower) in Bern. Here political issues are presented in a refreshing way for citizens as possible, the Federal Chancellery and Parliamentary Services run a political forum in the Käfigturm (prison tower) in Bern. Here political issues are presented in a refreshing way for visitors, school classes, tourists and passers-by. Thematic exhibitions are staged along with talks, podium discussions and films. A large selection of information leaflets is available. Political parties and other organisations can hold meetings and small-scale events in the political forum.

www.edoeb.admin.ch

Ensuring transparency and protecting privacy

Everyone has the basic right to decide whether and how their personal data are used. The Data Protection Act is designed to protect this right. It sets out the conditions under which private persons, state authorities and companies may process our data. The Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner (FDPIC) ensures that the law is respected and provides advice on issues relating to data protection and the freedom of access to information, for which he is also responsible. Based on the principle that state affairs should be made public, citizens can view federal administrative documents simply by applying to do so. If the office concerned refuses the applicant access, the FDPIC can be called upon to mediate.
Distribution of materials in a warehouse of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on the outskirts of Pristina in Kosovo: The OSCE is providing technical assistance for the local elections in Northern Kosovo, where over 200 staff members are being supplied with equipment in its centre for logistics and communication.

One member of the technical support team is Christopher Tütsch who has been working since May 2013 on behalf of the FDFA at the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, the largest of the OSCE’s 17 field missions. Bekim Troshupa, of the unit for managing material and logistical support, makes sure that the helmet and protective vest fit. Equipment for the field mission includes mobile radios and telephones, street maps and an OSCE vehicle, as well as an emergency kit containing a torch, batteries, candles, and water. On election day, OSCE Mission staff will be responsible for ensuring that there are no technical glitches in the 44 polling centres.

When he is not working in the field, Christopher Tütsch is senior programme officer at the OSCE Mission in Pristina. His main task is to support the democratisation process, including better integration of civilians in decision-making processes at the municipal level. The Mission mandate also includes the promotion of the rule of law, and respect for human rights in Kosovo.

Switzerland has been a member state of the OSCE since its founding in 1975 and assumes its chairmanship in 2014. Around a dozen Swiss nationals work for the OSCE. Christopher Tütsch is one of them. 5800 staff are employed at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs overall.
The FDFA safeguards Swiss interests abroad and implements the foreign policy adopted by the Federal Council. For the period 2012–2015, the Federal Council is placing particular emphasis on fostering and expanding relations with neighbouring countries and with the European Union as a whole. Switzerland will assume the chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2014. In so doing, Switzerland will be in a position to implement a further foreign policy priority in stepping up its efforts to promote stability in Europe and neighbouring regions. In addition, the FDFA will use modern technologies to continuously update and improve its services for Swiss nationals abroad.

The Presidential Affairs and Protocol section is also attached to the State Secretariat. It coordinates ceremonial matters and protocol, and is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Protocol Rules of the Swiss Confederation.

**Directorate of Political Affairs**

**Head:** State Secretary Yves Rossier

Evaluating global challenges, developing foreign policy strategies, and identifying emerging tensions and trouble spots – the Directorate of Political Affairs is where all of the information comes together to enable Switzerland to safeguard its interests abroad. The Directorate of Political Affairs, headed by the State Secretary, handles day-to-day foreign policy business and is the body to which the representations abroad report.

Five geographical divisions are responsible for bilateral relations with the states in their individual regions, and for coordination with the federal administration. A further division implements policy in the United Nations and other international organisations, and is responsible for Switzerland’s policy as the host country to these organisations.

The Human Security Division is concerned with promoting civil peace and strengthening human rights. It focuses on the security of the individual and protecting people against political violence, war and acts of arbitrary brutality. The Sectoral Foreign Policies Division ensures that Switzerland maintains a coherent position in the areas of finance and economics, the environment, transport, energy, health and education, and science and space exploration.

The Security Policy Division is concerned with international security, arms controls and disarmament.

**Directorate of European Affairs**

**Head:** State Secretary Yves Rossier

The State Secretariat supports the heads of department in the development and planning of foreign policy. The responsibilities of the State Secretary, who may represent the head of department both within the government and externally, include the maintenance, coordination and ongoing development of Switzerland’s bilateral relations with other states and the EU, cooperation with international organisations such as the United Nations, and Swiss security, peace and disarmament policy. He is supported in this role by the Directorate of Political Affairs, which he heads as Director.

Reporting directly to the State Secretary is the Crisis Management Centre, which publishes travel advice with assessments of the security situation abroad and issues information about the most important developments via Twitter. It also looks after Swiss nationals in cases of armed conflict, political unrest, attempts on their lives, natural disasters and kidnappings.

**Directorate of Political Affairs**

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**Directorate of European Affairs**

**Head:** Director-General Didier Burkhalter

The Directorate of European Affairs deals with Swiss relations with the European Union and the European Union’s relations with third states. It leads the Federal Government’s relations with the Council of Europe and EU institutions such as the European Council, the European Parliament, and the European Commission. It supervises the work of the FDFA’s Delegations to the EU, which is active at the highest level and is responsible for ensuring that the interests of Switzerland are represented in the decision-making processes of the EU.

**Directorate of Public International Law**

**Head:** Director-General Gross

The Directorate of Public International Law safeguards the rights and interests of Switzerland that derive from international law. It ensures that Switzerland fulfills its obligations and is pro-active around the world in promoting respect for and the further development of international law. In practical terms, this means negotiating, concluding and implementing international treaties. The Directorate’s remit also involves handling assets held by political dictators, the legal aspects of Swiss neutrality, human rights issues and the Geneva Conventions for the protection of victims of war. The DIL is also responsible for relations with the Principality of Liechtenstein. The Swiss Maritime Navigation Office, which is the regulatory authority governing maritime shipping under the Swiss flag, is attached to the DIL because it deals primarily with relations under international law.

**Consular Directorate**

**Head:** Consul General Jörg Bert

The Consular Directorate CD ensures the optimum level of public service for Swiss nationals abroad. It supports the representations abroad in their provision of reliable and efficient consular services, providing the tools that are required for the job and co-ordinating and optimising cooperation with national and international partners.

When Swiss nationals abroad find themselves in difficulty and need help, the CD coordinates between the representations abroad, the relevant organisations and authorities and family members in Switzerland. The FDFA Helpline (+41 800 24 7 365) acts as central point of contact and handles enquiries round the clock.

An app provides information on the security situation at your travel destination and the nearest Swiss representation (www.fdfa.admin.ch). In addition, the CD is responsible for institutional relations with Swiss nationals abroad. It provides information on all questions relating to emigration and living abroad on its www.swissimmigration.ch website.

**Swiss representations abroad**

Switzerland is represented at around 170 locations abroad with embassies, general consulates, cooperation offices and missions to international organisations, which safeguard diplomatic interests, offer consular services, act as point of contact for visa applications from foreign nationals and are active in international cooperation. Many representations also host other bodies such as Swiss Business Hubs, swissnex, Switzerland Tourism and Pro Helvetia. Switzerland also has a network of some 190 honorary consulates, covering individual areas of responsibility.

**Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation**

**Head:** Director-General Walter Rüttimann

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC implements the Federal Council’s foreign policy strategy in the areas of humanitarian aid, development cooperation and co-operation with Eastern Europe, as well as in regional and global cooperation. The SDC supports the victims of crises and armed conflicts, and with the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit SHA, provides emergency and reconstruction aid following natural disasters and armed conflicts. Working alongside the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO, the SDC also administers what is known as the ‘enlargement contribution’ in new EU member states. In selected key countries and regions affected by extreme poverty or armed conflict, the SDC supports rural development, state and administrative reforms, and programmes and projects which improve the people’s access to education and healthcare, or increase employment and incomes. Through its cooperation with Eastern Europe, the SDC supports political and economic reforms in accordance with the mandate conferred upon it by the Federal Council and Parliament.

At the multilateral level, the SDC is involved in international organisations, within the framework of global programmes, the SDC supports targeted initiatives and projects relating to climate change, water, food security, migration and health. The SDC provides regular updates on its work, as well as on deployments to emergency situations and disaster areas, on its website, in a newsletter, and in its ‘One World’ magazine, which is available in French, German and Italian.

**Directorate for Resources**

**Head:** Director General Rodrigo Arfundo

The Directorate for Resources DR manages the FDFA’s human, financial, logistical, IT and other resources as a centre of expertise and as a service provider. It is responsible for the security of representations and staff. At the same time it ensures that Switzerland’s network of representations abroad can be run efficiently, providing all of the resources needed for smooth operation locally, and for communication and coordination with the head office in Bern.

The department’s Legal Service also forms part of the DR, as does the Swiss Government Travel Centre, which is responsible for organising international business travel for the whole of the federal administration.
To bake a cake…

…we mix chocolate, flour and eggs. We pour the mixture into a bright green silicone baking tray. Then we slide the tray into the oven at 200 °C and let the cake bake for 20 minutes. The delicious smell of baking soon wafts through the kitchen, dispelling any concerns over health. And that’s a good thing!

Loris Zollinger and his colleagues at the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office FSVO work to ensure our baking experience is safe. Loris Zollinger, who is training to be laboratory technician specialising in chemistry, carefully examined these silicone baking trays, and how to use them in our kitchen. It had been shown that at high temperatures siloxane polymers could seep from certain models into the cake mixture in the mould. It was not clear whether these substances were harmful to human health and whether these silicone baking moulds complied with legal requirements. Only a thorough examination proved that there is nothing to fear when the moulds are used correctly, as siloxane polymers do not react in the human body. Loris Zollinger carefully examined the most common baking moulds in the laboratory. He began by freezing the baking moulds with liquid nitrogen so they became brittle, and then broke the moulds into small pieces for testing.

The aim of the merger between the Food Safety Division of the Federal Office of Public Health and the former Federal Veterinary Office is precisely to ensure maximum safety across the entire food chain. Today, the same office handles the prevention of animal diseases and the safety of silicone baking moulds. This makes it easier to enforce food safety guidelines and to ensure consumer safety.

Loris Zollinger is in the first year of his apprenticeship to become a laboratory technician specialising in chemistry and is one of around 2600 federal employees at the Federal Department of Home Affairs FDHA.
Federal Department of Home Affairs FDHA

General Secretariat GS-FDHA

Director: General: Lukas Bühler

The General Secretariat is responsible for planning, coordination and controlling. It acts as a hub between the federal and local departments and provides consultancies for the entire department. Its legal service supervises charitable national and international foundations. The Federal Commission against Racism, the Service for Combating Racism and the Bureau for the Equality of People with Disabilities are affiliated to the General Secretariat.

Swiss Federal Archives SFA

Director: Andreas Ketterhals

The SFA evaluates, safeguards, catalogues and raises public awareness of Confederation documents with archival value. The full inventory extends over 50 kilometres and 13 terabytes and includes original documents such as the Federal Constitution, deeds, photos, films, recordings and databases. In a democratic constitutional state, the archiving of such records is essential for continuity and transparency and it enables citizens to exercise democratic control over government and administrative activities and provides a basis for research.

Federal Office for Gender Equality FOGE

Director: Sylvie Durrer

The FOGE is responsible for gender equality and equal opportunities at federal level. It is particularly active in the areas of equality before the law, equal pay for paid work, equal opportunities in the field of unpaid work and in the fight against domestic violence. It supports advice centres, initiatives and projects to promote equal opportunities. The Secretariat of the Federal Commission for Women’s Issues is affiliated to this office.

Swiss Meteorological Institute MeteoSwiss

Director: Peter Binder

As the national weather and climate service, MeteoSwiss provides weather and climate information, thus making a significant contribution to society, politics, economics and sciences. The surface observations system, weather radars, satellites, radio sounding and other instruments monitor the weather. In addition to monitoring the weather, it produces weather forecasts, and to warning the authorities and the public in the event of severe weather, Meteo Swiss also analyses climate data, which produces evidence of climate change and extreme weather events and which serves as a basis for developing climate scenarios.

Federal Office of Culture FOC

Director: Isabelle Chassot

The FOC formulates the federal government's cultural policy. It promotes cultural life in all its diversity and creates the conditions to ensure that it can continue to flourish. It promotes artistic creation and supports cultural organisations and Switzerland’s various linguistic and cultural communities. It ensures the preservation of historic buildings and monuments, areas of local character and archaeological sites. The FOC is the contact point for queries regarding looted art and the transfer of cultural goods. The FOC manages a number of valuable collections, including the federal art collection.

Swiss National Library NL

Director: Martin-Christine Ofly

The Swiss National Library’s task is to collect, preserve, catalogue and provide access to all printed and electronic publication relating to Switzerland. In addition, the NL houses a series of special collections, the most important being the Swiss Literary Archive and the Graphic Collection. The Durrer Centre in Neuchâtel is also part of the Swiss National Library.

Federal Veterinary Office FVO

Director: Hans Myss

The FVO is the specialist service for animal welfare. It is committed to safeguarding the health of animals and humans, since healthy animals ensure food safety. It is responsible for animal protection, epidemic disease control and safety in the primary production of food of animal origin. It prepares the national legislation in the areas of animal protection and animal health, and supports the consistent implementation of the law in the cantons. It also supervises cross-border trade of live animals, animal products and food of animal origin, and provides an important contribution to the protection and preservation of animal and plant species in its capacity as enforcement authority of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). In addition, the FVO conducts applied research and supports research projects in the areas of its activities. The Institute of Virology and Immunology (IVI) is affiliated to the FVO. The IVI is the control centre for vaccines and sera for animals and the Swiss reference laboratory for the diagnosis, monitoring and control of highly infectious animal diseases.

Federal Statistical Office FSO

Director: Georges-Siméon Urich

Statistics help to create transparency in relation to social and political issues. The FSO therefore publishes information on the situation and trends in Switzerland in many different areas of social, economic and political issues, the quantitative information needed to understand the present and to plan for the future. The Statistical Yearbook, Pocket Statistics and, most importantly, the new internet portal provide an overview of the available information and give links to more detailed statistics. The FSO ensures that the services it provides are scientific, topical, user-friendly and comply with data protection regulations.

Federal Social Insurance Office FSIO

Director: Jörg Buchholz

Switzerland has an effective and solid social insurance system, which is an important element in upholding social peace. This needs to be maintained in the future, even under difficult economic conditions. The FSIO ensures that the elements of the social insurance system within its remit are properly administered and adapted in line with new challenges; these are Old Age and Survivors’ Insurance (AHV), Invalidity Insurance (IV), supplementary benefits, occupational pension funds, compensation for loss of earnings for people doing military service and women on maternity leave, and family allowances. In addition, it is responsible for federal level for dealing with issues relating to family, children, youth and old-age, generational relationships and for general socio-political issues. The FSIO oversees the work of the implementing bodies and is responsible for regularly adapting legislation to changing social realities. In some areas, such as startup funding for child day-care services, it is itself the implementing body.

Swiss Agency for Therapeutic Products Swissmedic

Director: Jörg N. Schneider

Swissmedic is the agency responsible for authorising and overseeing all therapeutic products. It ensures that only high quality, safe and effective medicinal products are on the market, thereby making an important contribution to human and animal health. The institute works with partner agencies on a national and international level.

Swiss National Museum SNM

Director: Andreas Spillmann

Three museums – the National Museum in Zurich, the Château de Prangins and the Forum of Swiss History in Schwyz – as well as the collections centre in Altfinsterm Albia – are united under the umbrella of the Swiss National Museum (SNM). The permanent exhibitions at the museums present Swiss cultural history from its beginnings to the present, and give an insight into Swiss identity and the rich tapestry of our country's history and culture.

Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia

Director: Andrew Holland

Pro Helvetia is a public foundation supporting projects of national interest which encourage cultural exchange in Switzerland, promote Swiss artistic activity abroad and help to make the arts more accessible to the public. Pro Helvetia complements support for the arts at cantonal and local level. It makes funding decisions independently.
When an ‘exact’ reading is not good enough

Not the slightest noise can be allowed to interfere with the measurement, otherwise it will not be accurate enough. Christian Hof and Aurélie Mindel, who work at the Federal Institute of Metrology (METAS), are preparing an experiment. They want to simulate what a human ear perceives in a hearing test. This is why they are setting up their experiment in an anechoic chamber. The chamber, which looks like an oversized honeycomb, does not reflect any sound waves. However, this is still not enough. In order to ensure the measurement is internationally comparable, Aurélie Mindel and Christian Hof also need to maintain the specified air pressure of exactly 1013.25 millibars and take account of the temperature.

This may seem exaggerated, but the precision of their measurement has very real consequences. The physicist and the METAS intern are making sure that the devices used in hearing tests throughout Switzerland produce beeps of exactly the same volume. The devices used by ear specialists will then be calibrated based on their measurements.

The METAS scientists are commissioned by the federal government to handle matters relating to units of measure and measurement procedures. The most precise measurements in Switzerland can be carried out at the laboratory in Wabern. They are necessary to support business and research and to enforce laws. Imagine what would happen if the police’s speed cameras didn’t measure speeds consistently and you were flashed despite travelling at the local speed limit. It would not be allowed to happen. That is why all speed cameras and lasers are thoroughly tested before they are approved for use. Another example is the calibration of petrol pumps, which is carried out by cantonal calibrators, supported and supervised by METAS. They ensure that for every litre clocked on the pump you have a litre in your fuel tank, not a drop more, not a drop less.

Christian Hof is a physicist and Aurélie Mindel is a chemist at the Federal Institute of Metrology METAS. They are two of around 3100 federal employees at the Federal Department of Justice and Police FDJP.
Federal Department of Justice and Police FDJP

General Secretariat GS-FDJP

The General Secretariat supports and advises the head of department in her daily work and ensures that the different sections of the department cooperate smoothly. It coordinates business for parliament and the Federal Council, it informs the public of the FDJP’s activities and manages human resources and finances for the whole department. The Information Technology Service Centre ISC-FDJP also forms part of the FDJP. It develops and manages IT applications, such as search systems or the register of criminal records, for the justice, police and migration authorities throughout Switzerland. Post and telecommunications surveillance services also come under the administration of the ISC-FDJP.

Federal Office of Justice FOJ

The Federal Office of Justice drafts legislation on civil law, criminal law, debt collection and bankruptcy law, international private law and public and administrative law. The office also advises the other agencies of the federal administration on all legislative matters. It is responsible for keeping the register of convictions, the supervision of the commercial register, the register of births, marriages and deaths, the land registry, debt collection and bankruptcy and the execution of sentences and measures. It provides several subsidies for youth welfare residential units also help to ensure the quality of the educational work. The Federal Office of Justice represents Switzerland at international level at the Strasbourg human rights bodies and in many other organisations and is the central authority dealing with international child abduction cases and adoptions. The Office collaborates with foreign authorities in the spheres of legal assistance and extraditions.

Federal Office of Police fedpol

Fedpol employees carry out a range of tasks to protect the population and the state. On behalf of the Office of the Attorney General, they investigate several hundred cases of serious crimes a year at federal level. These crimes include terrorism, organised crime and money laundering. Fedpol also supports the cantonal prosecuting authorities in various fields, such as the fight against human trafficking and smuggling or internet child pornography. Fedpol also ensures the protection of federal authorities and buildings and of persons and buildings requiring protection under international law. Fedpol is also responsible for Swiss passports and ID cards and acts as an intermediary between the authorities and Swiss nationals. Fedpol provides central police services throughout Switzerland for national and international partners, such as data exchange as well as operations to search for persons or property and to identify persons and leads. To strengthen the fight against cross-border crime, fedpol concludes policing agreements with individual countries.

Federal Office for Migration FOM

Anyone who copies, sends or reproduces music outside the private sphere must pay a royalty to the author. This obligation also applies to literary or audiovisual works. Compensation is not only paid to the artist, but also to anyone who exhibits or sells such work to the public. All these types of compensation are agreed between the Swiss collecting companies and the associations of users concerned and set forth in tariffs. The task of the Arbitration Commission is to examine and approve these tariffs.

Federal Gaming Board FGB

The FGB is the supervisory authority for the 21 casinos in Switzerland. It ensures that casinos offer their patrons a fair and enjoyable game. It also ensures that casinos fulfill their duty of care and comply with legal provisions to fight money laundering and to prevent compulsive gambling. It also investigates illegal gambling in Switzerland. The FGB levies the gaming tax on the casinos' gross gaming revenue and channels most of the tax into the Old Age and Survivors compensation fund.

Swiss Institute for Comparative Law SICL

Other countries, other customs' is a German saying which is particularly pertinent in Switzerland, a small nation with a wide network of relations with foreign countries. 'Other customs', i.e. foreign law, can be of relevance in mixed nationality families or when Switzerland is involved in disputes. The Federal Commission on Migration FOM works with the cantons to organise the accommodation of asylum seekers and the return of persons not eligible for protection in Switzerland to their country of origin. The Federal Office for Migration FOM decides who receives protection in Switzerland from persecution, according to the legal provisions. The FOM works with the cantons to organise the accommodation of asylum seekers and the return of persons not eligible for protection in Switzerland to their country of origin. The Federal Office for Migration FOM also provides information on foreign legal systems to the courts, authorities and lawyers. The SICL provides reference models and sources of inspiration for the legislative process to ensure that Switzerland can benefit from experience gained in other countries.

Federal Arbitration Commission for the Exploitation of Copyrights and Related Rights

The FOM employees decide who receives protection in Switzerland from persecution, according to the legal provisions. The FOM works with the cantons to organise the accommodation of asylum seekers and the return of persons not eligible for protection in Switzerland to their country of origin. The Federal Office for Migration FOM also provides information on foreign legal systems to the courts, authorities and lawyers. The SICL provides reference models and sources of inspiration for the legislative process to ensure that Switzerland can benefit from experience gained in other countries.

National Commission for the Prevention of Torture NCPT

In order to prevent and to combat torture, the Federal Commission for the Prevention of Torture (NCPT) is set up under the Convention Against Torture, thereby explicitly committing itself to taking all necessary efforts to combat torture. The task of the NCPT is to examine complaints that persons suspected or charged with torture or other ill-treatment have been ill-treated while in custody or while awaiting trial. The Commission also advises the cantons and foreign authorities on all matters relating to torture.

Federal Commission on Migration FOM

The FOM employees decide who receives protection in Switzerland from persecution, according to the legal provisions. The FOM works with the cantons to organise the accommodation of asylum seekers and the return of persons not eligible for protection in Switzerland to their country of origin. The Federal Office for Migration FOM also provides information on foreign legal systems to the courts, authorities and lawyers. The SICL provides reference models and sources of inspiration for the legislative process to ensure that Switzerland can benefit from experience gained in other countries.

Federal Audit Oversight Authority FADA

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Federal Institute of Intellectual Property IIP

Creative minds can register their inventions and creations with the IIP to protect them from being copied: new technical inventions can be patented, names can be trademarked and shapes or forms protected. The IIP provides information online and over the phone for all those interested and gives support for patent research. The Institute also advises the federal authorities on matters relating to intellectual property and represents Switzerland in this field abroad and in international organisations.

Federal Institute of Metrology METAS

Swiss products and services are characterised by accuracy, quality and reliability. This requires precise and accurate measurements and testing. METAS is at the forefront of measurement accuracy; it is the place where Switzerland is at its most accurate. Through its work and the services it provides, METAS ensures that Switzerland is able to measure and test as accurately as required by business, research and administration. METAS is also preparing the legal framework for metrology and together with the cantons supervises the use of measuring instruments on the market as well as those which are used for public safety and for monitoring the environment.
Sunrise over the Alpnach military airfield. It promises to be a beautiful summer’s day at the Swiss armed force’s air transport headquarters. This is where flight crews train and from where they set out on operational and rescue missions.

Alexandre Marmy from armasuisse is pleased that the weather is so fine. He and Walter Schrackmann, who works for the Armed Forces Logistics Centre, are inspecting the new photovoltaic installation on the roof of their recently renovated air hangar. The 1270 square metres of solar panels will soon be producing power for the airfield, enough to meet the needs of 40 households annually. A few last details need to be discussed. How many hours of sunshine can be expected each year? How high will the yield be? These figures are very important to Alexandre Marmy. He is a specialist for electrical installations with armasuisse real estate and has the overview of the electrical installations at all of the DDPS’s 14000 buildings. Walter Schrackmann is the industrial electrician who will be responsible for maintaining the installation.

In the course of a year, the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport consumes about 4000 terajoules of energy. About a third of this is consumed in buildings throughout Switzerland. The DDPS therefore has a sustainable energy concept, an ongoing programme to improve operating efficiency and renovate its properties in order to increase energy efficiency. The roofs of barracks and other army premises provide huge potential for producing renewable energy. Armasuisse wants to continue to exploit this over the coming years. For example, with installations to produce clean electricity like this one in Alpnach.

Alexandre Marmy is an electrical installations specialist with armasuisse.
Walter Schrackmann is an industrial electrician at the Armed Forces Logistics Centre in Othmarsingen; they are two of the 12200 federal employees in the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport DDPS.
Civil Protection

The P in DDPS stands for civil protection. Civil protection is an integrated system to provide crisis management, protection, rescue and assistance. In the event of disasters and emergencies it ensures the cooperation of the five partner organisations: the police and fire services, the health service, technical operations and civil defence. A joint management body is responsible for coordinating and managing operations.

Responsibility for civil protection lies mainly with the cantons. The federal government is responsible in particular for issuing instructions in the event of increased radioactivity, emergencies relating to dams, epidemics and livestock epidemics and armed conflict.

Within the FOPC there are two services with special tasks. The National Emergency Operations Centre in Zurich is responsible for warning and alerting the authorities and emergency services. The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology

Armasuisse

Armasuisse is the DDPS competence centre for procurement, technology, real estate and geodata. It ensures that the armed forces, other federal offices and external parties are supplied with the systems, vehicles, equipment and properties that they require. Armasuisse is one of four federal government procurement centres.

There is scarcely a household in Switzerland that doesn’t have some Armasuisse product in it, such as the high quality products of the Spiez Laboratory (swissstop) or the personal equipment of a member of the Swiss Armed Forces. Armasuisse comprises the Federal Office of Topography (swisstopo) and the following areas of competence: command and reconnaissance systems (e.g. procurement of radio and communication technology), land systems (e.g. procurement of vehicles, arms and ammunition), air systems (e.g. procurement of planes and helicopters), purchasing and cooperation (e.g. procurement of personal equipment), science and technology (e.g. procurement of sensor technology and munition control), resources and support (e.g. finances, enterprise development) and real estate (sustainable management of approx. 14,000 properties, sites and 24,000 hectares of land belonging to the DDPS).

As armasuisse is responsible for arms, equipment and real estate during their entire life cycle, it is also responsible for their liquidation at the end of their useful life.

Sport

The S in DDPS stands for Sport. The Federal Office of Sport FOSPO promotes sports and physical activity for the whole population. Its activities focus on the positive effects of sport and movement: health, education, performance and the economy. FOSPO devises and develops national sports policy and implements the resulting tasks. FOSPO’s most important programme is Youth+Sport, in which around 550,000 young people take part each year in 75 different disciplines. The Swiss Federal Institute of Sports in Magglingen, Bern is one of the most important training facilities in Swiss sport. Its core competencies include teaching, research and development as well as services in the fields of sport and sport science.

In Magglingen and Tenero (Ticino) FOSPO runs state-of-the-art education, training and course centres which are open to universities, associations, clubs and schools.

Federal Intelligence Service

The Federal Intelligence Service FIS has the legal mandate to conduct a global evaluation of the threat to Switzerland, thus contributing directly to the protection of the country with its operative and preventative services. To this end it obtains analyses and evaluates intelligence before passing on its findings and assessments with the aim of providing a situation analysis suit able for decision-makers at all levels. Particular emphasis is placed on the early recognition of threats and dangers, but also on identifying opportunities for Swiss interests. The FIS deals with topics such as terrorism, proliferation, violent extremism and illicit intelligence gathering, but also with regional security developments, including their military aspects. The Service is supported by a broad network of domestic and foreign partners. It is supervised by various bodies of the administration and parliament.

Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport DDPS

General Secretariat GS-DDPS

Secretary-General

Brigitte Riedmüller

www.ddu.admin.ch

The head of the DDPS has a very wide range of responsibilities and is supported in his daily work by the General Secretariat, a team of specialists from very varied fields that also plans for the medium and long term. The GS manages, coordinates and monitors the use of department funds in the areas of personnel, finances, legal affairs, IT, spatial planning and environment. It is also responsible for security policy strategy, communication, the Arm Gusanplan Library, translation services, the DDPS Damage Compensation Centre and Information Security and Facility Protection ISFP.

Office of the Armed Forces Attorney General

Armed Forces Attorney General

www.oa.admin.ch

The Office of the Armed Forces Attorney General AFAG ensures that the military courts can fulfil their task independently of armed forces command and of the administration. The Armed Forces Attorney General is the head of the military justice system and highest military prosecutor. He instigates and monitors criminal proceedings in the military courts and fulfils all other procedural obligations and duties assigned to him by the legislature.

Defence

Chief of the Armed Forces

Lieutenant General André Blattmann

www.armex.ch

The second D in DDPS stands for Defence, the backbone of the Swiss armed forces in planning, leadership and management. Defence is the largest sector in the department and is headed by the Chief of the Armed Forces, who holds the rank of lieutenant general (three-star general). The Defence sector consists of the Armed Forces Planning Staff and the Armed Forces Joint Staff, the Land Forces and the Air Force, the Armed Forces College, the Armed Forces Logistics Organisation and the Armed Forces Command Support Organisation.

The Armed Forces Joint Staff is responsible for implementing political guidelines and directives on a military strategy level. It is also in charge of development, planning, resource allocation and steering in the armed forces, and ensures the required level of readiness of the forces and operations, whether for the security for the Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, peace support in the Balkans (e.g. by Swisscoy in Kosovo) or disaster relief for avalanches, flooding or forest fires in Switzerland or abroad.

The Commanders of the Land Forces and the Air Force, also lieutenant generals, bear overall responsibility for training the Land Forces and the Air Force and for preparing ground and air units for action.

The militia officers and professional soldiers are educated and trained at the Armed Forces College. The Logistics Organisation ensures the supply and return of arms, equipment and food, maintenance and infrastructure, medical services and the transport troops. The Command Support Organisation provides all necessary electronic support services.

Civil Protection

Director

Wolfgang Scholl

www.bevoelkerungsschutz.ch

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Sport

Director

Matthias Renomé

www.bspo.ch

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Federal Intelligence Service

Director

Markus Seller

www.ndb.admin.ch

The Federal Intelligence Service FIS has the legal mandate to conduct a global evaluation of the threat to Switzerland, thus contributing directly to the protection of the country with its operative and preventative services. To this end it obtains analyses and evaluates intelligence before passing on its findings and assessments with the aim of providing a situation analysis suitable for decision-makers at all levels. Particular emphasis is placed on the early recognition of threats and dangers, but also on identifying opportunities for Swiss interests. The FIS deals with topics such as terrorism, proliferation, violent extremism and illicit intelligence gathering, but also with regional security developments, including their military aspects. The Service is supported by a broad network of domestic and foreign partners. It is supervised by various bodies of the administration and parliament.

Armasuisse

Chief of Defence Procurement

Ulrich Appenzeller

www.armasuisse.ch

Armasuisse is the DDPS competence centre for procurement, technology, real estate and geodata. It ensures that the armed forces, other federal offices and external parties are supplied with the systems, vehicles, equipment and properties that they require. Armasuisse is one of four federal government procurement centres.

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A foot on the career ladder

Geomaticians, electricians, fruit growers or laboratory assistants, such as Loris Zollinger, we meet them at the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (page 50). The Federal Administration provides 1171 traineeships in over 40 occupations. With 300 apprenticeships, the traineeship to become a business administrator is the biggest in terms of numbers. Just like insurance companies or banks, the Federal Administration operates its own sector to train business administrators.

Christine Vincent looks after these trainees. She is just preparing a group of vocational trainees for their final examinations in the Federal Office of Personnel (FOPER). Important questions still crop up just before the end of the apprenticeship. However, Christine Vincent knows how to deal with this. She heads the body in FOPER for commercial training and examinations in the Federal Administration. Her main duties include organising courses in sectoral training. Sometimes she can even be found acting as a lecturer in classes.

In the Federal Administration’s commercial apprenticeship, topics such as social studies and public finances are particularly important. How many signatures are required for an optional referendum to take place? Christine Vincent’s students certainly know how many.

Christine Vincent is deputy head of the education and training section in FOPER and is one of approximately 9200 federal employees in the Federal Department of Finance (FDF).
Federal Department of Finance (FDF)

General Secretariat GS-FDF

State Secretariat for International Financial Matters SIF

The State Secretariat for International Financial Matters (SIF) defends Switzerland’s interests in international financial, monetary and tax matters and represents the country – alongside the Swiss National Bank – in influential bodies such as the Financial Stability Board, the International Monetary Fund and G20 working groups. SIF develops the national regulatory framework to ensure that Switzerland can be a secure, competitive and globally recognised financial centre and location for business. It is responsible for implementing the financial market policy of the Federal Council and conducts negotiations on tax issues with the EU and other major partners. SIF is also engaged in global efforts to fight money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

Federal Finance Administration FFA

The Federal Finance Administration (FFA) is responsible for implementing the financial market policy of the Federal Council and conducts negotiations on tax issues with the EU and other major partners. FFA is also engaged in global efforts to fight money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

Federal Office of Personnel FOPER

The FFA’s transparent accounting ensures that parliament and the people can see how their taxes are being spent. As an attractive employer, the Federal Administration contributes to the country’s strong standing in the international competition among locations for work. FOPER ensures that the Federal Administration remains a competitive employer and can continue to attract and retain the best people for the job.

Federal Tax Administration FTA

Without tax receipts there would not be enough money to finance all government tasks. The FTA raises a major part of the Confederation’s receipts and so ensures that the Confederation can fulfil its public duties. It is responsible for VAT, direct federal tax, withholding tax and stamp duty. The FTA also provides international administrative assistance in tax matters. Within Switzerland, it prepares legislative amendments to tax law and contributes to a healthy tax environment. In performing its tasks, it is committed to efficiency, expertise and partnership.

Federal Customs Administration FCA

Switzerland generates every second franc abroad. Swiss Customs has the task of operating what will soon be the only customs border in western and central Europe in such a way that import and export businesses and travellers notice as little as possible. By combating commercial smuggling, the FCA prevents competitive distortions and contributes to citizens’ health and safety. It also levies consumption taxes such as mineral oil tax and tobacco duty. The Border Guard is the uniformed and armed section of the FCA and is the largest national civilian security organisation. Aside from carrying out customs services and customs-related policing activities, the BG’s duties include tracing persons, vehicles and stolen property, fighting cross-border crime and carrying out duties in the migration sector.

Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunication FOIT

People expect to have electronic access to the Administration’s services in all areas, whether it is to order a new passport or file tax returns. The FOITT plays a major role in providing a link between the Confederation and the public, whether in terms of access to information and services via the Internet, or linking checkpoints at airports and borders with administrative units in Bern. It provides the federal offices with modern, uniform workplace systems and enables efficient access to the central information repositories and applications.

Federal Office of Buildings and Logistics FOBL

The FOBL builds, maintains and manages the federal government’s civil properties, whether it’s the Federal Palace, administrative buildings or Swiss embassies around the world. It attaches great importance to sustainable construction methods in the case of both new builds and renovations. In addition, the FOBL manages the procurement controlling process at federal level, focusing on compliance and sustainability. As the central procurement office, it buys ICT resources, office equipment, publications and printed materials for the entire Federal Administration. In addition, it personalises biometric identity documents.

Federal IT Steering Unit FITSU

The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) should provide optimal support for the activities of the Administration and be as cost-efficient and secure as possible. These objectives are anchored in the Federal Council’s IT strategy. The FITSU is responsible for seeing that the strategy is applied. For this purpose, it issues guidelines for the administrative units and centrally manages the ICT standard services such as office automation or telephony. The FITSU also coordinates cooperation between the Confederation, cantons and communes in the field of e-government, and manages the Reporting and Analysis Centre for Information Assurance to protect ICT in Switzerland’s critical infrastructure.

General Secretariat GS-FDF

Syrus Stadler

As an administrative unit, the FDF General Secretariat supports the head of department in her day-to-day work. This includes planning, coordinating and checking all FDF items of business. The FDF General Secretariat is best described as the interface between the various service providers and the Head of Department. The employees make legal enquiries, put together dossiers, provide information to the public, translate and publish documents. The Resources Division of the GS-FDF advocates the proper implementation of the necessary measures concerning personnel, finances, ICT, security and departmental projects. The delegate for plurilingualism in the Federal Administration is also part of the General Secretariat.

State Secretariat for International Financial Matters SIF

State Secretary: Jacques de Watteville

The State Secretariat for International Financial Matters (SIF) defends Switzerland’s interests in international financial, monetary and tax matters and represents the country – alongside the Swiss National Bank – in influential bodies such as the Financial Stability Board, the International Monetary Fund and G20 working groups. SIF develops the national regulatory framework to ensure that Switzerland can be a secure, competitive and globally recognised financial centre and location for business. It is responsible for implementing the financial market policy of the Federal Council and conducts negotiations on tax issues with the EU and other major partners. SIF is also engaged in global efforts to fight money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

Federal Finance Administration FFA

State Secretary: Serge Guillard

As the Confederation’s supreme audit institution, the Federal Audit Office has the right to request information from all federal employees about their work. It endeavours to identify deficiencies and weaknesses, and improves the performance of federal activities by convincing staff of its expert recommendations.

Federal Pension Fund PUBLICA

Director: Dieter Stehler

As an autonomous body of the Confederation which deals with old age and invalidity insurance (AHV, IV) and compensation for loss of earnings, Swissmint produces the country’s coinage.

Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunication FOIT

Director: Giovanni Conti

Switzerland is one of the world’s leading financial centres. The financial sector is therefore extremely important for the country’s economy. The Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority (FINMA) supervises the main players and areas of Switzerland’s financial centre, i.e. banks, insurance companies, stock exchanges, funds requiring authorisation, thereby protecting both financial market clients and the financial markets’ ability to function. It thus helps boost the financial centre’s reputation and competitiveness.

Swiss Federal Audit Office SFAO

Director: Michel Haisseuw

The FFA also draws up a financial plan for the coming year. The FFA also defrays the legal framework of the monetary system.

Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority FINMA

Director: Mark Brusen

The FFA’s transparent accounting ensures that parliament and the people can see how their taxes are being spent. As an attractive employer, the Federal Administration contributes to the country’s strong standing in the international competition among locations for work. FOPER ensures that the Federal Administration remains a competitive employer and can continue to attract and retain the best people for the job.

Swiss Alcohol Board SAB

Director: Fritz Etter

The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) should provide optimal support for the activities of the Administration and be as cost-efficient and secure as possible. These objectives are anchored in the Federal Council’s IT strategy. The FITSU is responsible for seeing that the strategy is applied. For this purpose, it issues guidelines for the administrative units and centrally manages the ICT standard services such as office automation or telephony. The FITSU also coordinates cooperation between the Confederation, cantons and communes in the field of e-government, and manages the Reporting and Analysis Centre for Information Assurance to protect ICT in Switzerland’s critical infrastructure.

The Federal Pension Fund (PUBLICA) is responsible for implementing the pension system of the Confederation and cantons which is committed to efficiency, expertise and partnership.

As an administrative unit, the FDF General Secretariat supports the head of department in her day-to-day work. This includes planning, coordinating and checking all FDF items of business. The FDF General Secretariat is best described as the interface between the various service providers and the Head of Department. The employees make legal enquiries, put together dossiers, provide information to the public, translate and publish documents. The Resources Division of the GS-FDF advocates the proper implementation of the necessary measures concerning personnel, finances, ICT, security and departmental projects. The delegate for plurilingualism in the Federal Administration is also part of the General Secretariat.
We are visiting the construction site of the vonRoll centre. The hot asphalt is being poured on the surface for the outside area of the cafeteria. It is here in Bern’s Länggasse neighbourhood that a seven-storey institute is being built for the University and the University of Teacher Education of Bern. The building will accommodate around 4500 students and up to 850 professors, researchers and other staff. The library and its storage area will house more than 80 kilometres of bookshelves and several million documents.

Urs Zemp (middle) from the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) is being shown the progress of the construction work by Susanna Krähenbühl and Hugo Fuhrer. As an architect and as head of the Finance and Investment Unit for universities and universities of applied sciences, he regularly visits construction sites of cantonal educational institutions. Together with his team, Urs Zemp evaluates the construction projects and determines the amount of federal financial support. During his visit of a construction site, he then checks to make sure the requirements of the federal government are met. ‘Switzerland holds a leading position in education, research and innovation.’ This is what the Federal Council has set out as one of its goals for the legislature period of 2011–2015. And, meeting this goal requires funding for research projects and academic operations, but also for infrastructure.

In his work, Urs Zemp often has dealings with the various federal levels of the Swiss education system. Susanna Krähenbühl works as an architect and project manager at the University and Hugo Fuhrer works as a project coordinator for the canton of Bern, which is responsible for the University. They work together on construction projects for education, research and innovation in Switzerland.

Urs Zemp is Head of the Finance and Investment Unit of the Universities Division at the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) and is one of around 2400 federal employees in the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research EAER.
State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI

Mauro Dell'Ambrogio

Education, research and innovation are essential for Switzerland's economic and social development. SERI focuses on three areas. It is responsible for national and international questions relating to vocational education and training, general education, universities, research, innovation and aerospace. Important education dockers include preparing and recognising the legal basis in the area of vocational and professional education and training, which SERI prepares together with the cantons and the business community, recognising the cantonal baccalauréate and organising the Swiss baccalauréate examination. SERI's key tasks also include the promotion of universities and universities of applied sciences as well as preparing and assessing implementation of the federal government's performance mandate in the ETH Domain. SERI invests in the quality of Switzerland as a location for expertise and know-how with resources for the Swiss National Science Foundation, academies, non-university research institutions, Switzerland's memberships in international research organisations and cooperation in international scientific programmes.

Federal Office for Agriculture FOAG

Bernhard Lehmann

Switzerland has 1.052.325 hectares of farmland, 1.646.690 head of cattle in its pastures and 162.028 people employed in the agricultural sector. Each year, the federal government provides agriculture with financial support of around CHF 3.7 billion. The FOAG works to ensure that the country's farmers produce high quality foodstuffs in a way that is both sustainable and market oriented. Its aim is to have a multifunctional farming system that contributes to meeting the food needs of the population, maintaining the basic necessities of life, as well as the settlement of rural areas. A socially acceptable balance must be sought between developments in domestic policy and the need to respond to changing external factors. The FOAG deals with the development of rural areas and promotes agricultural research at its Agroscope research stations.

Office of the Price Supervisor

Stefan Meierhans

People used to worry about the cost of a cup of coffee. Now it tends to be doctors' or hospital bills, water rates, rubbish disposal and postal charges, radio and television licence fees or the cost of public transport. The Office of the Price Supervisor protects consumers and companies from excessive pricing. It monitors price trends and blocks or eliminates improper price increases that have not resulted from free competition.

Federal Office for National Economic Supply FONES

Gisèle Girgis-Musy

Switzerland sources virtually 100 per cent of its raw materials, 80 per cent of its energy, 40 per cent of its food, and a large proportion of essential therapeutic products from abroad. All kinds of incidents, from technical disruptions to political tensions in the source countries, can interrupt the flow of vital goods to Switzerland. In its capacity as centre of expertise in matters regarding security of supply, the FONES, in close collaboration with the private sector, ensures that short-term supply shortages do not result in significant disruption for the population and economy. It ensures, for example, that in the event of transport problems sufficient cargo space is available or that the lights stay on even if there is a shortage of power.

Federal Housing Office FHO

Gerard Haeri

Housing is a basic need, but houses and apartments are also important economic assets. Each year around CHF 29 billion is invested in housing construction. Living costs are the greatest items of expenditure for households. Tenants pay some CHF 32 billion on a year in rent and around CHF 18 billion is paid by homeowners to creditors in mortgage interest payments. The FHO works closely with property developers to ensure that there is an adequate supply of affordable housing and that changing needs are taken into account. The FHO also seeks to reconcile the interests of landlords and tenants in the area of tenancy law.

Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training SFVET

FHO

Dirk Colombi

Professionals in vocational and professional education and training (VET/PET) at all levels: SFVET is the federal centre of expertise for basic and continuing training of VET/PET professionals, and for development and research in this field. It also trains VET/PET specialists in its Masters Programme in vocational and professional education and training. SFVET maintains a close-knit network with national and international partners.
Old towns are a great place to linger and discover the small specialty shops, boutiques, restaurants and bars, winding streets, fountains and squares, which are all located in a small area surrounded by historical buildings. Old towns are vibrant. As historical centres, they are an important part of our cultural heritage and social identification, which is worthy of protection.

This description does not, however, correspond to the reality of all old towns in Switzerland. While the centres of the most populated cities such as Zurich, Geneva, Basel or Lausanne bustle with activity during the day, the regions outside of these urban centres often present a different picture. The old town of Delémont was on the verge of becoming desolate with city life shifting increasingly over the last decades from the picturesque historic centre of the main city of the Jura to the railway station area and the outskirts. This is why the authorities stepped in and using exemplary spatial planning succeeded in restoring the old town's liveliness. For over ten years, city planner Hubert Jaquier has consistently focussed on developing the area between the railway station and the old town. Major distributors committed to build in this area, while small shops were renovated and successfully redesigned.

The ‘Old Town Network’ plays a crucial role in the revival of old towns. It began as a private initiative and was further developed with the participation of the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE). Later on, the Swiss association for land use planning (Schweizerische Vereinigung für Landesplanung VLP) took over responsibility and has since carried out projects such as the one in Delémont. The ARE uses sustainable spatial development trial projects to revitalise town centres. It provides financial support and shares know-how with the local authorities. In the picture, Melanie Butterling (left), who works as a geographer for the ARE and as a trial project coordinator, Hubert Jaquier, Delémont urban planner, and Christa Perregaux DuPasquier from the VLP are walking along the Rue de la Préfecture, which is part of the popular and once again lively old town in Delémont.

Melanie Butterling works as a project manager and geographer for the Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE and is one of the 2400 federal employees in the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications DETEC.
The General Secretariat of the GS-DETEC oversees the implementation of the strategic aims set out by the Federal Council. The Independent Complaints Authority for Radio and Television, the Communications Commission (ComCom), the Swiss Accident Investigation Board SAIB, the Regulation Authority in the postal market (PostReg), the Federal Electricity Commission (ElCom), the Swiss Federal Nuclear Safety Inspectorate, the Federal Inspectorate for Heavy Current Installations, the Federal Pipelines Inspectorate and the Railways Arbitration Commission are all affiliated to the GS-DETEC for administrative purposes.

The Federal Office of Transport FOt is responsible for public transport in Switzerland. It is also responsible for safety supervision in public transport. It issues the regulations required for safe construction and operation. In addition, it carries out random checks to ensure that public transport companies are fulfilling their responsibility with regard to safety. The aim is to maintain the high level of safety on Swiss roads that is further supported by, if this can be achieved at reasonable cost.

The Federal Office of Civil Aviation FOCA is responsible for the safety of civil aviation. The GS-DETEC also prepares items of business for the Federal Council. It carries out the tasks set by the Federal Council and parliament, monitors communication. It is also primarily responsible for the resources required within the department. In addition, it also acts as owner of Swiss Post, SBB, Swisscom and Skyguide and supervises the implementation of the strategic aims set out by the Federal Council.

The Federal Office of Communications OFCOM oversees the electronic communications infrastructure in place. OFCOM has the task of enabling, licensing and supervising all this. With the growing challenges of the 21st century, there is a need for ever more powerful infrastructure. In order to ensure that everyone in Switzerland can benefit, OFCOM oversees all important steps at the political level. In addition it is laying the foundations of a modern infrastructure. OFCOM also allocates frequencies for radio and television stations. It ensures that the individual radio and TV stations do not infringe the conditions of their licence, e.g. on surreptitious advertising, and distributes the revenues from licence fees fairly among all regions in Switzerland. Likewise, OFCOM pays subsidies to lower the costs for mailing newspapers and magazines.

The Federal Office of the Environment FOEN is responsible for nature conservation, environmental protection and research into the storage of radioactive waste. It is also responsible for the safe operation of nuclear installations in Switzerland. It is an independent public body and reports directly to the Federal Council. ENSI took over from the Federal Nuclear Clear Safety Inspectorate HSKe, which used to be part of the Federal Office of Energy. The overriding aim of the federal government’s supervisory activities in the field of nuclear energy is to protect the population and environment from harm resulting from radioactivity. ENSI therefore supervises Switzerland's five nuclear power stations, the interim storage sites for radioactive waste and the nuclear research units at the Paul Scherrer Institute, Federal Institute for Technology in Lausanne and the University of Basel. This involves ensuring that operators comply with regulations, facilities are in a safe condition and operated according to regulations and there is sufficient protection against radioactivity. ENSI is also responsible for the safe transport of radioactive material and research into the storage of radioactive waste in deep geological repositories.
Welcome to the Grand Courtroom of the Federal Supreme Court in Lausanne. Gilbert Kolly, President of the Federal Supreme Court, often leads guests into this imposing room and explains how the highest judicial authority in Switzerland works. One of his duties is to act as the public face of the Federal Supreme Court. The room, in the Art Nouveau style, is just as it was when it was built in 1927.

This is where public sittings are held. The federal judges hold a discussion and then vote in order to reach a decision. They sit on symmetrically arranged chairs, with the president of the division concerned taking the central place. But public sittings are rarely held. In most cases, a judgment is in fact made behind closed doors in an exchange of correspondence. Scenes with plaintiffs, defendants and lawyers, which are familiar to us from American movies, are unknown at the Federal Supreme Court.
The Judiciary

The Federal Supreme Court is the highest court in Switzerland and is therefore the highest judicial authority of the Confederation in civil, criminal, administrative and constitutional matters. It ensures the uniform application of federal law in Switzerland’s 26 cantons.

The Federal Supreme Court is independent and subject only to the law. It is the administrative supervisory authority of the three federal courts of first instance: the Federal Criminal Court, the Federal Administrative Court and the Federal Patent Court. Through its decisions, the Federal Supreme Court helps to develop the law and adapt it to changed circumstances.

Interview with Gilbert Kolly, President of the Federal Supreme Court

Mr Kolly, what are your main duties as President of the Federal Supreme Court?

As the president, I head the whole court and am also the public face of the Court. I represent its interests and those of the federal court system before the Federal Assembly in Bern and in the parliamentary committees. I also represent the court in various national and international court organisations.

How does one become a federal judge?

In principle, this office is open to all Swiss citizens who have the right to vote. There is no compulsory training for judges. All the federal judges are in fact experienced lawyers who have undergone years of legal training and can look back on a long professional career. In general, they have all been cantonal judges, judges in the lower federal courts, legal professors, solicitors or high-ranking officials. Each judge is appointed by the Federal Assembly for a period of six years, the Assembly ensures that the national languages, regions and political parties are fairly represented. Judges can be re-elected an unlimited number of times, until they reach the age of 68.

The Federal Supreme Court is the highest court in Switzerland. What does this mean exactly?

The Federal Supreme Court makes a final ruling on appeals against judgments made in the upper cantonal courts and the federal courts. In other words, the Federal Supreme Court has the final word in Switzerland, and in its decisions ensures that federal law is applied uniformly and developed. The Federal Supreme Court rulings provide a basis upon which the other courts can make their decisions. The Federal Supreme Court helps to develop the law and adapt it to changed circumstances.

What happens when a case comes before the final judicial authority in Switzerland?

In general, an appeal is lodged, and then the opposing party is invited to respond. In the vast majority of cases, the judges do not need to meet to make a decision; one judge proposes a draft ruling which is circulated to his or her colleagues for their written agreement. If the judges involved do not agree, they meet publically to deliberate on the matter. The judges discuss and hold a vote in one of the courtrooms in the presence of the parties and general public. This means that the draft ruling and any proposed amendments to it must first be read out. The judges then give their opinion, each speaking in their own language. Once the discussion has been closed, the judges vote in a show of hands. The dates of these public sessions are published in advance on the Federal Supreme Court’s website (www.bger.ch). Members of the public can listen to the proceedings from the part of the courtroom reserved for the public.

The General Secretariat

The GS serves as the staff office for the court and the governing bodies. The Secretary-General participates in the meetings of the governing bodies in an advisory capacity. He also heads the court’s scientific and administrative services.
The Federal Supreme Court

The Federal Supreme Court affords an opportunity for legal redress, ensures the uniform application of federal law and develops the law in accordance with changes in society. It is not proactive, but acts in response to complaints. As a rule, an appeal can only be made to the Supreme Court if a ruling has been made by a cantonal court of final instance or the Federal Criminal, Administrative or Patent Court. The Federal Supreme Court is the court of final instance for almost all areas of law:

Public cases
The Federal Supreme Court hears appeals in matters of public law. These include political rights (the right to vote, popular elections and votes), basic rights (personal freedom, equality before the law etc.) and tax law. The two public law divisions rule on cases in these areas.

Civil cases
The Federal Supreme Court also rules on appeals relating to civil matters. These include civil law (e.g. family law), the code of obligations (e.g. purchase contract law) and commercial law. In disputes relating to assets, the value of the claim must amount to at least CHF 30,000 and CHF 15,000 in cases relating to employment or tenancy law. The two civil law divisions rule on disputes in these areas of law.

Criminal cases
The Federal Supreme Court hears appeals against cantonal decisions in criminal cases or against decisions of the Federal Criminal Court.

Social law
The Federal Supreme Court, in particular the two social law divisions, deals with appeals in public matters against decisions of the cantonal insurance courts.

The Federal Criminal Court

The Federal Criminal Court is the general criminal court of the Confederation, and has its seat in Bellinzona. It operates independently, but is subject to the administrative supervision of the Federal Supreme Court and the supervisory control of the Federal Assembly, which appoints the court’s judges. There are currently eighteen judges and their term of office lasts six years. Around 40 members of staff assist them in their work. Since 1 January 2012 the court has been composed of one criminal chamber and one appeals chamber. Some of the Federal Criminal Court’s decisions are final, but an appeal can be brought to the Supreme Court against the vast majority of its decisions.

Criminal Chamber
The Criminal Chamber is the court of first instance for offences that come under federal jurisdiction. These are mainly felonies and misdemeanours against federal interests, explosives offences and cases of white-collar crime, organised crime, corruption and money laundering offences that do not fall within cantonal jurisdiction or which have an international element. In addition, the Court has jurisdiction over offences under the Federal Acts on Civil Aviation, Nuclear Energy and Pipelines.

Appeals Chamber
The Appeals Chamber hears appeals against rulings and procedural measures of the Office of the Attorney General, the Federal Criminal Police and in matters relating to administrative criminal law. It also deals with cases concerning conflicts of jurisdiction between cantonal and federal prosecution authorities. The Appeals Chamber also rules on matters relating to international mutual assistance in criminal matters. It hears appeals against decisions relating to the extradition of persons facing prosecution or a sentence abroad, as well as appeals against decisions concerning other forms of mutual assistance relating to foreign criminal proceedings and sentences to be served abroad.

The Federal Administrative Court

The Federal Administrative Court in St. Gallen rules on appeals against decisions made by federal administration. In some areas the court is also responsible for assessing cantonal rulings and also makes judgments in some appeal cases. Provided the Federal Administrative Court does not act as the court of final instance, an appeal can be made against its rulings in the Federal Supreme Court. In more than half of all cases, the Federal Administrative Court’s ruling is final.

The Federal Administrative Court is independent in its judicial activities but is subject to the administrative supervision of the Federal Supreme Court and the supervisory control of the Federal Assembly. Federal Administrative Court judges are appointed for a six-year term of office.

Organisation
About 75 judges and 320 further staff are employed at the Federal Administrative Court. The court is organised into five divisions, each with two chambers and a General Secretariat.

The divisions are responsible for dealing with appeals and litigation proceedings. Each division deals with cases in a particular legal field.

• Division I is responsible for appeal proceedings in various areas including environment, transport, energy and taxes.
• Division II focuses on proceedings relating to education, competition and the economy.
• Division III deals mainly with proceedings in the field of immigration, social security and health.
• Divisions IV and V deal exclusively with asylum law.

The Federal Patent Court

The Federal Patent Court, as the Confederation’s court of first instance in patent-related matters, has since January 2012 heard civil disputes concerning patents instead of the cantonal courts, which have been responsible to date. It is exclusively responsible for validity and infringement disputes. Other civil suits in connection with patents can also be brought before the Federal Patent Court, such as suits regarding licence agreements or the right to a patent.

The Federal Patent Court renders its decisions as a lower court of the Federal Supreme Court. It is also subject to the Supreme Court’s administrative supervision and the supreme supervision of the Federal Assembly. The judges of the Federal Patent Court are elected by the Federal Assembly for a term of office of six years. Alongside two full-time judges there are also 36 part-time judges, 25 of whom have technical training and 11 of whom have legal training. They all have proven experience in the field of patent law.

Individual cases are heard by a panel of three, five or seven judges. Each panel is made up of lawyers and technical experts. The composition of the panels depends on the technical criteria. Preliminary measures are decided by the President sitting as a single judge. If technical questions arise in the course of proceedings, the President can call up two judges specialised in technical matters.

At the Federal Patent Court English may be used for submissions and at hearings instead of an official language if both parties give their consent. The Court’s decisions, however, are issued in an official language.

The Federal Patent Court seeks to ensure that cases are processed swiftly and cost-effectively. With the expertise of its judges, most cases should be able to proceed without having to call on the opinions of external experts, which are costly and time-consuming.
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