



The Swiss Confederation a brief guide 2006



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Chancellery FCh

Dear readers,

The aim of the brochure that you have in front of you changes little from year to year, namely to familiarise you with Switzerland's political institutions and executive authorities. The same is true of this 2006 edition illustrated by the Zurich photographer, Stefan Walter.

So why a new brochure each year? – At first glance this would seem to be a fair question. After all, the structure of the state and the organisation of its administration are (more or less) known quantities. Nevertheless, we try to present new aspects, point out special features or outline some of the Federal Council's specific goals.

I would like to mention two such goals for 2006 here: firstly, to keep our social welfare system on a firm financial footing, and secondly, the introduction of a uniform appearance for the whole of the federal administration.

With regard to the first: an important goal for our country in 2006 is the revision of our social welfare instruments such as old age, invalidity and medical insurance. Only when these state institutions are on a firm financial footing will future generations be able to benefit from genuine social solidarity.

The other goal, that of introducing a standard corporate design approved by the Federal Council, is also important because of its profile raising quality. It consists of a sleek logo of the Swiss cross and the slogan "Swiss Confederation" in the four national languages making a pleasant contrast to the array of logos that each agency has had up to now.

The social welfare system and the way in which the government presents itself have (at different levels) a good deal to do with identification and the awareness of being part of a reliable and responsible institution that is the state. For that reason both of these goals are well worth achieving!



The Federal Chancellor
Annemarie Huber-Hotz

Cover:
While the capital still sleeps, farmers from the region set up their market stalls in front of the Parliament Building each Tuesday and Saturday.

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In the “Bernerhof” everything is set for the banquet in honour of the Indian president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and his delegation. The former world class hotel is now home to the Federal Department of Finance and since its complete renovation in 2004 provides new representation rooms for the government just a stone’s throw from the Federal Palace.

Switzerland



in 2006: situation appraisal and outlook





Moritz Leuenberger, President of the Swiss Confederation, in conversation with Konrad Mrusek, correspondent with the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

Are the Federal Councillors actually on first name terms?

Mr Leuenberger, you were first president in 2001. That was a difficult year for Switzerland with the massacre in Zug, the Swissair bankruptcy, the Gotthard tunnel fire, plane crashes and more. Will 2006 be a better year?

I'm not particularly fatalistic. No-one would want to see a repeat of the disasters of that year.

But is there such a thing as balanced justice?

It is the noble task of politics to bring about such justice. And I also believe it is something that can be achieved. It is a fundamental pillar of our understanding of the state: All languages and cultures in our country should have the same opportunities to express themselves and remain united. Take our telecommunications services for example. Coverage is as area-wide as possible. That's not the case in all countries. In our Italian-speaking region, residents of the mountain valleys have access to broadband connections while those in the valleys in neighbouring Italy do not because there all roads lead to Rome.

Is the annually rotating presidency good for the country? Most other countries allow themselves a head of state.

For domestic purposes it is a good idea and one that I'm happy to accept. It allows a different cultural population group to be represented each year. One year it can be a villager from the mountains, another year, a woman from the French-speaking regions and a former union leader, or as is the case this year an urbanite like myself. The system acts as a kind of power disperser underlining the fact all members of the population in turn have the same opportunity to identify with the Confederation.

“For me power is exercising influence”

But I have to be honest and say that in terms of our international relations it is a big disadvantage. We don't exactly give the impression of being a stable country. Foreign governments dealing with Switzerland have to adjust to a new president each year. In our capacity as government ministers though we show an incredible degree of constancy. I am by far the longest serving transport and environment minister in the whole of Europe. That in turn lends us a sense of stability and credibility in the

dossiers we deal with, something that is lacking as far as the presidency is concerned..

Would a two-year cycle be better? Would it then be possible to make more out of the role?

Yes, the president would then be able to achieve a bit more, but the change would be minimal. In that case, we would have to push and say okay, the presidency lasts four years.

Does the presidency bring more power or is it mainly a ceremonial, perhaps oratory role?

I don't find the two ideas to be contradictory. For me power is exercising influence. And words can certainly make an impact. Even following tragic events, when the president has the task of putting the feelings of the people into words, he is influencing events and may be steering thoughts in a certain direction. Ceremonial duties for me don't simply mean appearing in a photo, but also demonstrating and defining the presence of the Confederation.

Then there is also the fact that the president gets to chair the sessions of the Federal Council. That too enables him to exercise greater influence than an ordinary Federal Councillor. In Switzerland, the notion of power

is not comparable to that of a prime minister who can remove members of his cabinet.

Should the president spend more of his time travelling and perhaps act as a kind of trade representative?

Under no circumstances should he only be a representative for trade. Of course he should help trade to be able to flourish, especially in Asian countries where it is usual for politics to act as a door opener for business. But I would say that culture is in just as much need of representation, at home and abroad, and the president has an equal amount of responsibility.

As to whether he should travel more... It's hardly possible to see how he could. When I look at my diary for this year, it's simply not possible to cram any more in. I still have my own large department to run. I also find that people travel around the world an unbelievable amount. We would be better off travelling less and in a more targeted manner. Besides, there's still the phone.

You are responsible for four portfolios; environment, transport, energy and communications. Other countries would have the same number of minis-

“Questions of morality, ethics and theology play an important role in politics of course.”

ters. Shouldn't Switzerland consider a different way of allocating these responsibilities at some point?

We speak about it a good deal, but we rarely change anything because there are only seven of us. What has changed are the expectations on the part of the parliamentary committees for us to attend their meetings in person. They accept that a Federal Councillor cannot attend every session, particularly not when several committees are meeting at the same time. This

“I can contain this conflict of interest”

is the system we have and we have to manage our time in such a way as to ensure that it works – and it does work.

Perhaps this bundling of tasks has certain advantages. It requires you to sort out the important from the unimportant?

Precisely. And the combination of environment and infrastructure is fascinating: It allows me to place particular emphasis on the policy of sustainable development. In most other countries, the environment and infra-

structure ministers are constantly battling against one another. As a rule, it's the transport minister who usually wins through on economic grounds. I can contain this conflict of interest within the department and steer matters myself. It's a really interesting job.

Is Switzerland better off thanks to its four-party government and the fact that it doesn't change coalitions as in Germany, for example?

Stability is, I believe, a big bonus. Here's an example: we have introduced a mileage-related heavy vehicle charge for trucks. It was highly controversial, but from the moment its introduction was approved by the people it was accepted. No one sought to sabotage it or delay its introduction until a possible change of government. In other countries tactics such as these play a greater role. Our system allows us to plan better for the longer term.

One gets the impression that things in the Federal Council aren't quite so collegial at the moment. Is there any truth in that or is it simply a figment of the media's imagination?

Things change. There is now greater transparency, and this

can be seen in the fact that little secret is made of individual positions before a collective decision is set to be taken. That wasn't so often the case before, and lately there is also a tendency to reiterate those views again after the event. In my view that does harm collegiality, but it doesn't necessarily mean its demise. There is every opportunity to express one's concerns, but once the Federal Council has taken its decision, it should be accepted and everyone should set

“Our system allows us to plan better for the longer term”

out the arguments that led to that decision. It's perfectly possible to ensure transparency while upholding collegiality. It is simple nuances in the way things are said that can do most harm. If someone sarcastically implies that all the rest are completely wrong, then collegiality is no longer in evidence. But that's not something you can put into a mould. To a large extent it's a matter of tone.

To what extent can the presi-

dent influence the tone of events and thus diffuse the threat to collegiality?

Through the way in which he organises the sessions, initiates individual discussions, or simply the general atmosphere. I remember when Adolf Ogi was president, he would stand outside the Federal Council chamber before the meetings and formally greet each person. The president can contribute to the atmosphere between the members as a whole.

Is the role of the president in the collegial body disputed or does he have to fight for his influence?

Oh no, the role is well accepted. But each president puts his own mark on the job. Ours is also a very small body with just seven members. Other governments hold their meetings in large rooms with long conference tables; we meet in a relatively small room. That alone creates a certain amount of familiarity which can be put to good use.

Switzerland has a culture of first name terms? Is that also true of the Federal Councillors?

During the sessions we address each other formally: “the honourable finance or infrastructure minister”, for example, or “Mr. President”. – As the longest



serving member, I'm also known as the doyen. This formality has its advantages: By addressing one another by our function, the discussion remains businesslike and not personal. The finance minister is not trying to make spending cuts to my infrastructure projects because he has something against me personally, but because it is his duty to look after the government's finances. Just as I don't argue for a rail link simply to pour money down the drain, but because it is my responsibility to maintain infrastructure. Afterwards over coffee we revert back to first name terms, of course.

And how does the council deal with the different languages? Does each member speak in his or her own tongue just like in the rest of the country?

Precisely. I keep a dictionary on my desk so that when a critical French term that I don't understand crops up, I can start to look it up. All the others then try to help. That sometimes helps to lighten the mood.

In physical terms, the Federal Palace is much closer to the people than many other parliaments. Take the Bundestag in Berlin, for example, it's set back from all the hustle and bustle.

Here in Bern, parliament is right next to the vegetable market. Is it also fair to say that federal politics is closer to the people as a result?

We certainly try to be. I often have people come up to me in the street and say: "It's wonderful that it's still possible to meet you without bodyguards, only in

"Collegiality is not something you can put into a mould"

Switzerland." Then at other times I can't help thinking that some would rather see us with these men and their earplugs because bodyguards generate a certain fascination.

A fascination for the people or for the politicians who have a confirmation of their importance?

I'm sure that might be a factor. But I'm not that kind of person. I don't think I could stand having protection or being guarded day in day out. We're lucky enough to still enjoy our privacy.

So as president you take the train and walk from the station to the office?

Yes. Not only out of political

conviction, but because it's also the most efficient means of transport. Trains are punctual and quicker than going by car.

Have you ever thought about having protection? Following the attack on the parliament in Zug, for example?

Those are exceptions: Following the introduction of the new approach path to Zurich airport, there were so many threats and protests that my house was guarded. And unfortunately, it's no longer quite so easy to get into the parliament building.

Another personal question if I may: In Germany a pastor's daughter is now chancellor, and in Switzerland a pastor's son is president. A coincidence? Or is it something to do with the upbringing in such homes?

My father was a professor of theology. There were frequent discussions in our house. Questions of morality, ethics and theology play an important role in politics of course. To reduce it to pragmatism though would be wrong. It's about shaping society and education and religious values play a decisive role in that respect.

Could it be that the urge to seek a political role is particularly

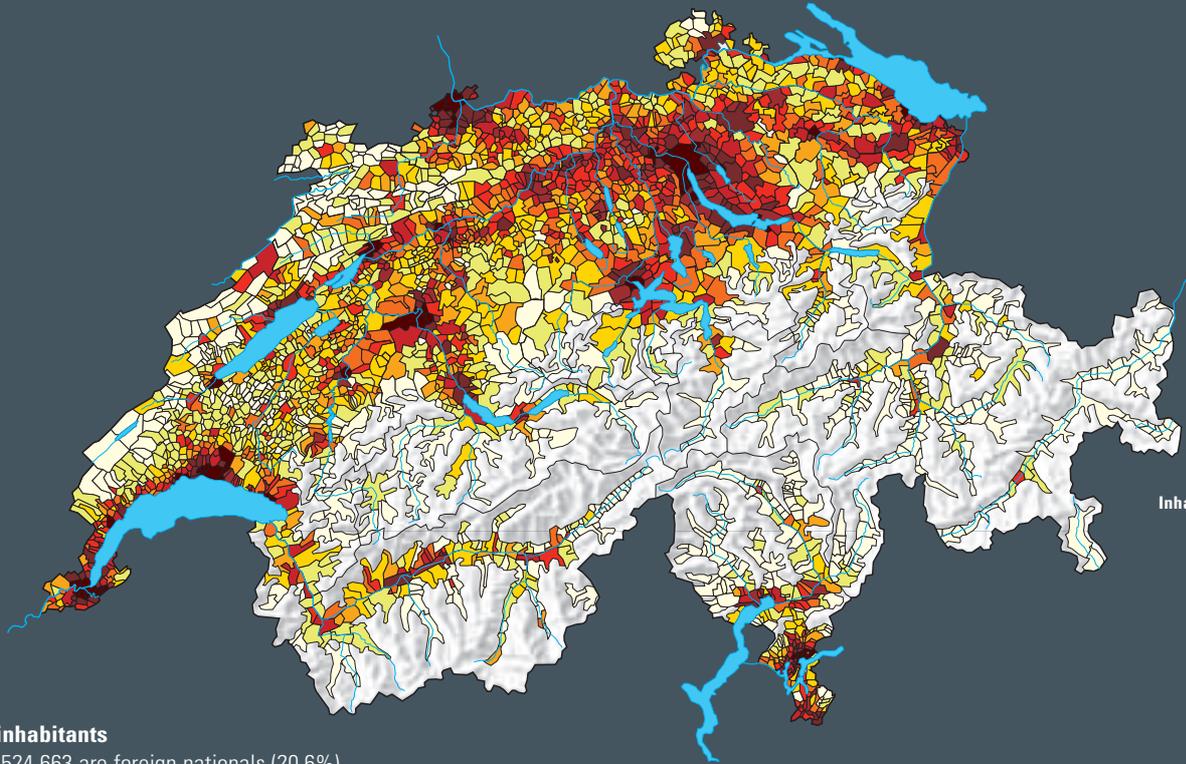
pronounced in the home of a theologian?

That might be one way in which political interest can come about, but it's not the only way and certainly not the most important. Someone who grows up in a family that experiences poverty and hunger or unemployment is just as likely to want to enter into politics.

Population

Population density

End of 2004



7 415 102 inhabitants
of which 1 524 663 are foreign nationals (20.6%)

Language regions

(Main language spoken by the majority)

2000

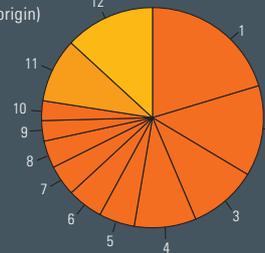


1 German	63,7%
2 French	20,4%
3 Italian	6,5%
4 Romansh	0,5%
5 Other	9,0%

Foreign nationals

(by country of origin)

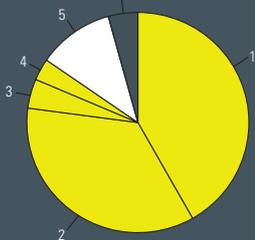
2004



1 Italy	19,8%	7 France	4,5%
2 Serbia Montenegro	13,1%	8 Macedonia	4,0%
3 Portugal	10,5%	9 Bosnia Herzegovina	2,9%
4 Germany	9,6%	10 Croatia	2,7%
5 Turkey	5,1%	11 Other European countries	9,6%
6 Spain	4,9%	12 Other continents	13,3%

Religion

2000



1 Roman Catholic	41,8%
2 Protestant	35,3%
3 Muslim	4,3%
4 Other religious communities	3,2%
5 None	11,1%
6 No details	4,3%

Age structure

(Five-year classes, in thousands)

2004

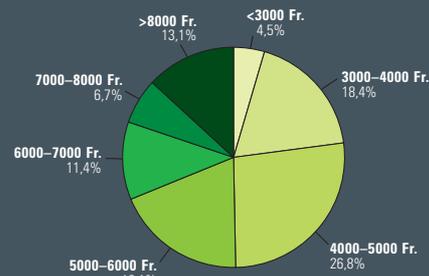


■ Swiss
■ Foreign nationals

Income

(net monthly; full-time employed)

2002



Household expenditure

2003

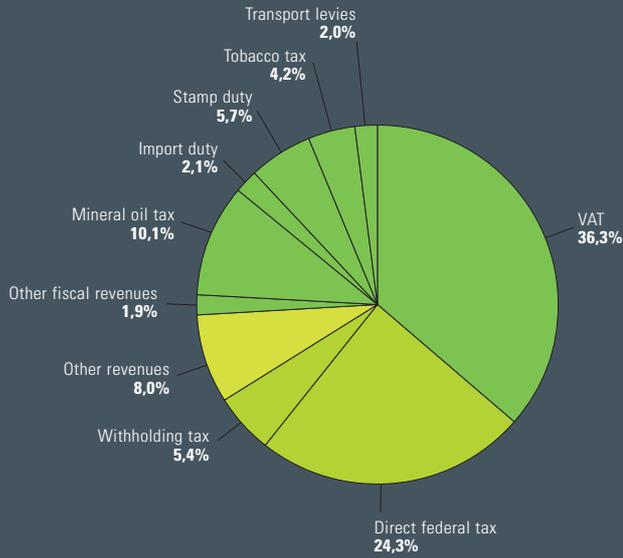


1 Food and alcohol-free beverages	8,1%
2 Clothing and shoes	2,9%
3 Housing (including energy)	17,6%
4 Transport and communications	9,6%
5 Entertainment, relaxation and culture	6,3%
6 Restaurant and hotels	6,1%
7 Social insurance contributions	15,3%
8 Taxes and charges	13,8%
9 Other expenditure	20,3%

Finances

Federal revenue

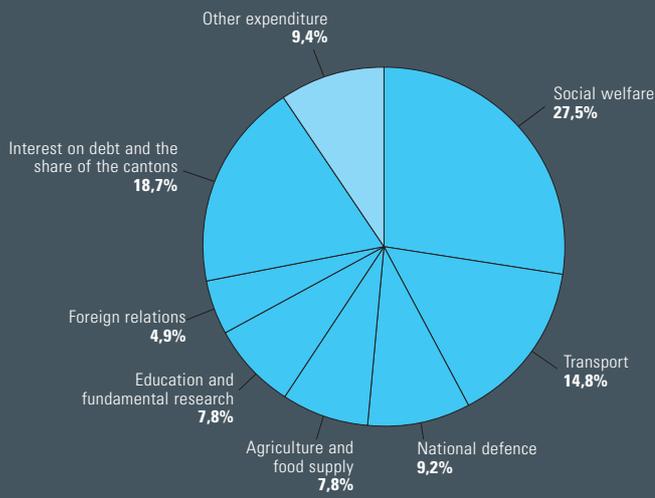
2004



Indirect taxes	CHF 30 296 m	62.3%
Direct taxes	CHF 14 443 m	29.7%
Other revenues	CHF 3 890 m	8.0%
Total revenues	CHF 48 629 m	100%

Federal expenditure

2004



Social welfare	CHF 13 813 m	27.5%
Transport	CHF 7 435 m	14.8%
National defence	CHF 4 641 m	9.2%
Agriculture and food supply	CHF 3 902 m	7.8%
Education and fundamental research	CHF 3 903 m	7.8%
Foreign relations	CHF 2 441 m	4.9%
Interest on debt and the share of the cantons	CHF 9 417 m	18.7%
Other expenditure	CHF 4 733 m	9.4%
Total expenditure	CHF 50 285 m	100%

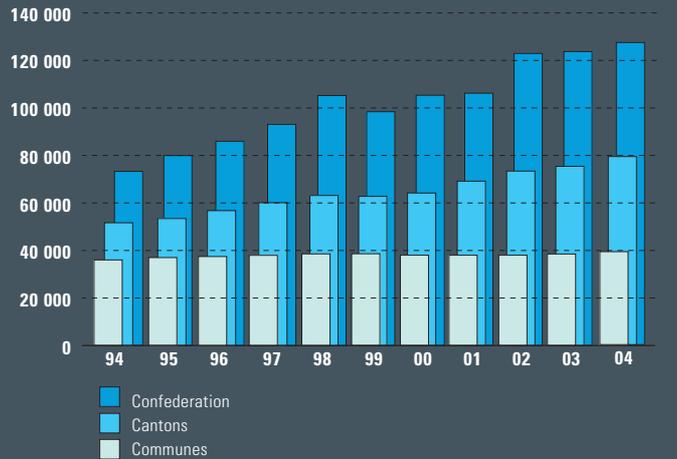
Developments in revenue

(CHF million)



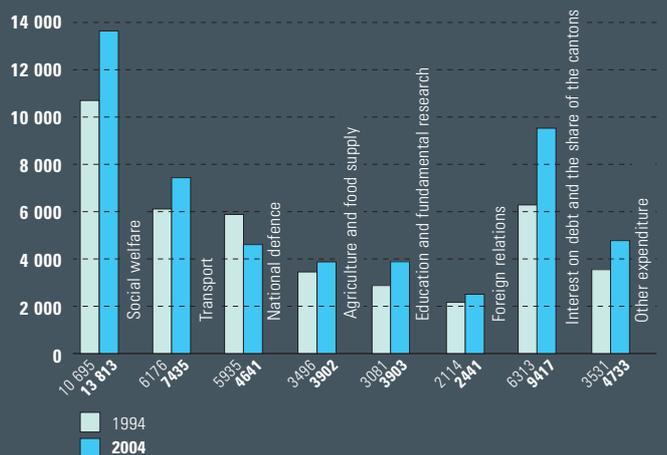
Developments in debt

(CHF million)



Developments in expenditure

(CHF million)



A brief look back at the events of 2005

January

The tsunami of 26 December 2004 in the Indian Ocean triggered a wave of solidarity worldwide. Switzerland provided emergency relief to the tune of around CHF 30 million and committed itself to providing the same again in a series of further contributions.

Some 100 experts from Switzerland went to the disaster area to help. The Federal Council approved the dispatch of three Super Puma helicopters to the area for a three-month posting, and Federal Councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey travelled to the region to see for herself what was needed for the reconstruction effort.

The Federal Council adopted a new foreign trade strategy with a view to improving access for Swiss suppliers abroad.

February

Federal Councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey visited the autonomous Palestinian Authority, Israel and Egypt to find out about developments in the region, particularly with regard to preparations for the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

Based on a decision by the Federal Supreme Court, Switzerland decided to transfer to Nigeria USD 458 million from the frozen assets of the former dictator, Sani Abacha. By returning this money, Switzerland set new standards in the fight against international corruption. The World Bank is monitoring the appropriate use of the funds.

The Federal Department of Finance and the Swiss National Bank decided that the revenues amounting to around CHF 21 billion from the sale of 1,300 tonnes of gold should be divided between the Confederation and the cantons with one third going to the Confederation and two-thirds going to the cantons.

The Kyoto Protocol entered into force. In order to help protect the environment, industrialised countries – including Switzerland – have made binding commitments to reduce the level of greenhouse gas emissions.

March

The Federal Council favours the sustainable use of the Confederation's third of revenues derived from the gold assets. Under the Budget Act, the funds constitute an extraordinary revenue and as such are to be used for the reduction of government debt.

For the first time, there is a change in trends with regard to the transfer of trans-Alpine traffic from road to rail: In 2004 there was a drop in the number of goods vehicles on transit roads and an increase in the number travelling by rail.

In order to be able to integrate Swiss International Airlines into Lufthansa, the Federal Council ceded the Confederation's 20% holding to the German company.

The 2004 armament programme failed to win approval in parliament.

April

The Federal Council's spending reduction plan requires the federal administration to streamline its organisation and procedures and forego a range of tasks. The roughly 160 measures should result in lasting annual savings of around CHF 190 million.

The main breakthrough in the Lötschberg base tunnel was achieved on 28 April, a milestone in the construction of the new Rail Link through the Alps (NRLA). The first trains should operate on the new route in 2007.

The Federal Council decided on new priorities for armed forces assignments. Greater emphasis should be placed on security assignments and resources for defence in the narrower, classic sense should be reduced.

President Samuel Schmid visited the Swiss pavilion at the World Expo in Japan and met the Emperor and Empress, the prime minister and the defence minister.

May

At its caucus on foreign policy, the Federal Council set a new course. In particular, it wants to intensify relations with the USA and ensure that Switzerland's interests are represented within international organisations even better than they are at present.

President Samuel Schmid received the Indian President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam for a two-day State Visit.

June

During her official visit to Kosovo, Federal Councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey set out the Swiss government's current position and reiterated that it wanted to see a political solution to the question of Kosovo's status.

The Cultural Property Transfer Act entered into force. The Act is intended to contribute to the preservation of mankind's cultural heritage and prevent theft, plundering and the illegal import and export of cultural property.

The country's voters said "yes" to Switzerland's participation in the Schengen and Dublin agreements as well as to the Registered Partnership Act.

On the evening of 22 June, a power cut brought the entire SBB rail network to a standstill for several hours. In order to prevent this from happening again, the causes were investigated and measures put in place to safeguard the power supply.

President Samuel Schmid paid a State Visit to Latvia.

July

A system of maternity pay under Income Compensation Regulations entered into force. Employed and self-employed women are entitled to receive 80% of their average income prior to the birth for a period of 14 weeks.

For the first time since its eradication 82 years ago, a brown bear reappeared in Switzerland. The sightings in the Münstertal and the National Park caused a sensation.

August

Federal Councillor Pascal Couchepin presented the political conclusions drawn from research findings based on the 2000 census.

The Federal Council adopted a dispatch on combating violence at sporting events.

Heavy rainfall caused lakes and rivers to reach record levels before bursting their banks, triggering landslides and floods that cost several lives and resulted in damage estimated at over CHF 2 billion. The armed forces and civil defence helped to cope with the storm damage: Over 2,700 soldiers were in action, many for a period of several weeks.

September

The additional tax burden faced by dual-income married couples compared with cohabiting couples in terms of Direct Federal Tax has contravened the constitution for years. In order to put right this discrepancy, the Federal Council put out a corresponding proposal for consultation containing immediate measures.

The occupational pension fund for federal employees underwent a fundamental change with the transition from a defined benefit plan to a contribution-based plan. At the same time, the federal pension fund, Publica, was consolidated.

On 25 September, the extension of the agreement on the free movement of persons to the new EU member states together with the accompanying measures against wage and social dumping passed the hurdle of the popular vote.

The Federal Council loosened the monopoly on letters: From April 2006, Swiss Post will only have a monopoly on the delivery of letters up to 100g; for all other services it will be in competition with private operators.

President Samuel Schmid represented Switzerland at the UN Conference on the Millennium Development Goals. This three-day summit in New York, which coincided with the 60th anniversary of the United Nations, was the largest ever gathering of heads of state.

October

As of October a climate cent is levied on petrol and diesel fuel. The Climate Cent Foundation is obliged to use the resulting revenues to achieve binding reductions in CO₂ emissions.

November

The Federal Council adopted a dispatch on a partial revision of the Patent Act which contains provisions on the patenting of inventions in the field of biotechnology.

On 27 November, the people for the second time adopted a popular initiative across all cantons: the GM-free initiative demanding a five-year moratorium on the cultivation of genetically modified plants in agriculture.

In addition, voters narrowly approved the referendum on the revised Employment Act; shopping at airports and larger railway stations on Sundays is therefore still possible.

The Federal Council wishes to fully relinquish the Confederation's holdings in Swisscom. To that end it commissioned the Federal Department of Finance to immediately start work on the drafting of a consultation paper that would amend the Telecommunication Enterprise Act accordingly.

December

Parliament adopted the revised Foreign Nationals Act. The partial revision of the Asylum Act, which was also debated, is designed to streamline asylum procedures and lead to the stabilisation at a low level of asylum applications.

The decision of the Diplomatic Conference held in Geneva to adopt a Third Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions means the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement now has an additional emblem known as the Red Crystal. Switzerland, in its capacity as Depositary State, arranged and chaired the conference. In the months leading up to the conference, Switzerland brokered an agreement between Magen David Adom and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society.

Federal Councillor Joseph Deiss represented Switzerland at the sixth WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong.

The Federal Council adopted a dispatch on the 2008 European Football Championships safeguarding security and containing measures on infrastructure, transport, communication and project coordination.



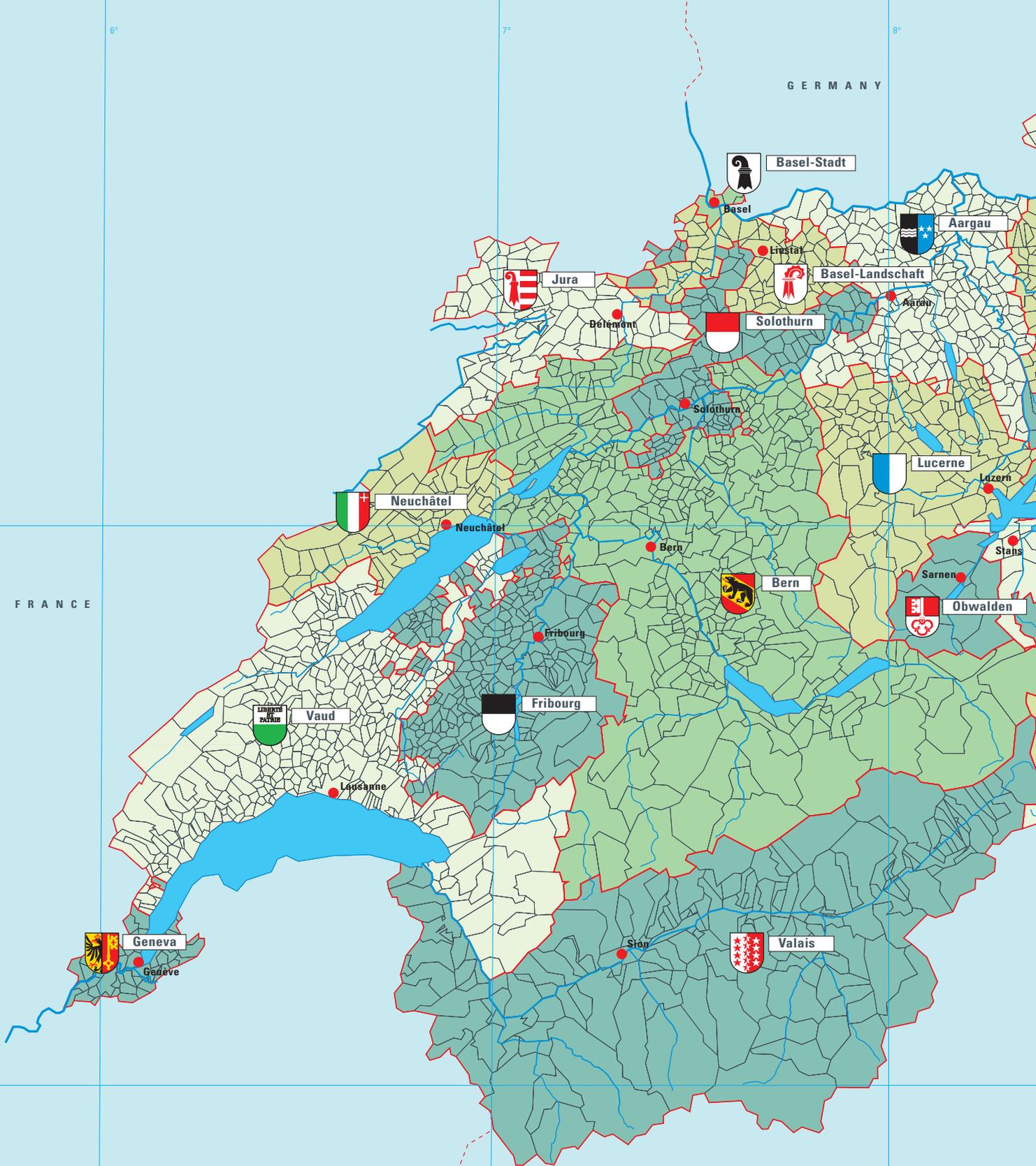
Direct Democracy: a distinctive feature





of Switzerland

Four dates are set each year for popular votes; these are usually on a wide range of issues. On average roughly half of the 4.8 million citizens make use of their right – increasingly by postal vote, but also still at the ballot box.



The political levels

Switzerland is a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-confessional nation shaped by the will of its people. It has been a federal State since 1848 – one of 23 in the world and the second oldest after the United States of America. Switzerland has a federal structure with three different political levels: the Confederation, the cantons and the communes.



The Confederation

This is the term used in Switzerland to describe the State. The Confederation has authority in all areas in which it is empowered by the Federal Constitution, such as in foreign and security policy, customs and monetary affairs, nationally applicable legislation and certain other areas. Tasks which do not expressly fall within the domain of the Confederation are matters for the cantons.

The cantons

Switzerland consists of 26 cantons. These are the original States which joined together in 1848 to form the Confederation to which they ceded part of their sovereignty.

Each canton has its own constitution, parliament, government and courts. The size of the cantonal parliaments varies between 58 and 200 seats, while the cantonal governments have 5, 7 or 9 members.

Direct democracy in the form of the "Landsgemeinde", or open-air people's assemblies, is now confined to Appenzell Inner-rhoden and Glarus. In all other cantons the people cast their votes at the ballot box.

The communes

All the cantons are divided into communes, of which there are currently 2,758. Their number is in decline due to amalgamations.

Around one-fifth of these communes have their own parliament; in the other four-fifths, decisions are taken by a process of direct democracy in the local assembly.

In addition to the tasks entrusted to them by the Confederation and the canton – such as the population register and civil protection – the communes also have their own competencies in the areas of education and social affairs, energy supply, road building, local planning, taxation, etc. To a large extent these powers are self-regulated.

The degree of autonomy granted to the communes is determined by the individual cantons and therefore varies considerably.

People's rights at federal level

There are very few countries in which the people have such far-reaching rights of co-determination as in Switzerland. The long democratic tradition, the comparatively small size, both in terms of geography and population, and ultimately also the high level of literacy and diversity of media are decisive in ensuring the proper functioning of this particular form of State.

Elections

All Swiss citizens over the age of 18 may take part in elections to the National Council both actively and passively: in other words, they may cast their votes and also stand for election themselves. Only federal civil servants are required to choose between their profession and elected office should they be elected.

Elections to the Council of States are not organised at federal level; they are governed by cantonal provisions.

Voting

Persons who are entitled to take part in parliamentary elections may also cast their vote in popular ballots, i.e. all citizens living at home or abroad over the age of eighteen, who have not been incapacitated on grounds of mental illness or mental debility.

A referendum is compulsory for all amendments to the Constitution and for membership to some international organisations. A vote must be held in such cases and a double majority is required for adoption: namely, a majority of the popular vote, the votes cast throughout the country, and a majority of the cantons, cantons in which the majority of voters adopted the proposal.

Amended or new laws and similar decisions of parliament as well as certain treaties in international law are only put to the vote if an optional referendum is sought. For such a proposal to be adopted only a simple majority of the popular vote is required.

People's initiatives

Citizens may seek a decision on an amendment they want to make to the Constitution. For such an initiative to take place, the signatures of 100,000 voters must be collected within 18 months.

A people's initiative may be formulated as a general proposal or – much more often – be presented as a precisely formulated text whose wording can no longer be altered by Parliament or the Government.

The authorities sometimes respond to such an initiative with a counter-proposal (generally less far-reaching) in the hope that the people and cantons will support that instead.

Since 1987, the possibility of a double "yes" vote has existed in ballots on people's 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.

People's initiatives do not originate from parliament or government, but rather from the people. They are regarded as the driving force behind direct democracy.

Referendums

The people are entitled to pronounce on parliamentary decisions after the event.

Federal laws, generally binding decisions of the Confederation and international treaties of indefinite duration are subject to an optional referendum: in this case, a popular ballot is held if 50,000 citizens so request. The signatures must be collected within 100 days of a decree's publication.

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.

Petition

All persons capable of forming judgements – so therefore not just those eligible to vote – are entitled to address written requests, suggestions and complaints to the authorities.

They in turn are required to take due note of such petitions and although it is not compulsory to provide an answer, in practice every petition is considered and does receive a reply.

The petition may relate to any activity of the State.

The political organisation of Switzerland

The people: the supreme authority

According to the Federal Constitution, the Swiss people are sovereign and ultimately the supreme political authority. The concept includes all Swiss adults who are eligible to vote – some 4.8 million citizens, equivalent to around 60 per cent of the resident population. Those under the age of 18 and foreign nationals have no political rights at federal level.

elects

Parliament: the legislative authority

The Swiss parliament consists of two chambers which, when in joint session, are known as the United Federal Assembly. It is the country's legislative authority.

The National Council, through its 200 members, represents the population of the country as a whole – the individual cantons are represented in proportion to the number of their inhabitants.

The Council of States represents the 26 cantons – 20 cantons are represented by two members while the six former half-cantons each send one representative to the 46-strong chamber.

Both chambers are directly elected by the people: the National Council, is elected in accordance with federal rules and the Council of States according to provisions differing from canton to canton. In both cases, the cantons form the constituencies.

Separation of powers

In Switzerland legislative, executive and judicial powers may not be exercised by the same persons. In effect, no individual may simultaneously belong to more than one of the three federal authorities – parliament, government and Supreme Court. However, for practical reasons each of the three authorities performs tasks which, strictly speaking, fall under the jurisdiction of another authority.

elects

The government: the executive authority

The government of Switzerland consists of the seven members of the Federal Council, as well as the Federal Chancellor, and is elected by the United Federal Assembly for a four-year term.

The President of the Swiss Confederation is elected each year and is considered *Primus inter pares* or first among equals during that time. He chairs the sessions of the Federal Council and undertakes special ceremonial duties.

and

The Supreme Court: the judicial authority

The highest rulings in Switzerland are made by the Federal Supreme Court in Lausanne, the Federal Insurance Court in Lucerne and since 2004 by the Federal Criminal Court in Bellinzona.

The court in Lausanne has 30 full-time and 30 part-time judges, that in Lucerne consists of 11 full-time and 11 part-time judges and the new court of first instance in Ticino currently has 11 judges.



The standing committees of parliament usually hold sessions for three to four days each quarter; in contrast to sessions of the National Council and the Council of States, their meetings are not open to the public. Here, the National Council Committee for Social Security and Health is voting on a motion in its chamber.

The Legislative





Branch: National Council and Council of States

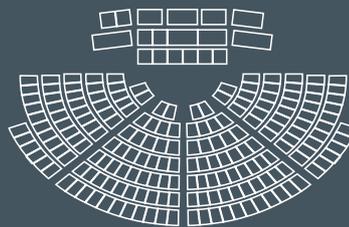


The election of parliament

Switzerland has a bicameral parliament at federal level: the federal chambers, which together constitute the United Federal Assembly. The National Council represents the overall population and the Council of States, the member states of the Confederation, i.e. 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.



The cantons are represented in the Council of States The *small chamber* has 46 seats: 20 cantons elect two representatives each and the six former half-cantons (Obwalden and Nidwalden, Appenzell Innerrhoden and Appenzell Auser-rhoden, Basel-Stadt and Basel-Landschaft) each elect one representative. In all cantons – with the exception of Jura – the people elect their deputies by a majority voting system.



The people are represented in the National Council The *large chamber* has 200 seats. The number of deputies from a canton (each of which is a constituency) depends on its population size. Zurich with its large population has 34 seats, while Uri and Glarus, Obwalden and Nidwalden and Appenzell Innerrhoden and Appenzell Ausserrhoden are each entitled to just one representative. Proportional representation is used for elections in cantons with more than one seat.

Seats in the Council of States	Canton	Seats in the National Council	Inhabitants
2	Zurich	34	1 228 600
2	Bern	26	947 100
2	Vaud	18	626 200
2	Aargau	15	550 900
2	St. Gallen	12	452 600
2	Geneva	11	414 300
2	Lucerne	10	350 600
2	Ticino	8	311 900
2	Valais	7	278 200
1	Basel-Landschaft	7	261 400
2	Solothurn	7	245 500
2	Fribourg	7	239 100
2	Thurgau	6	228 200
1	Basel-Stadt	5	186 700
2	Graubünden	5	185 700
2	Neuchâtel	5	166 500
2	Schwyz	4	131 400
2	Zug	3	100 900
2	Schaffhausen	2	73 400
2	Jura	2	69 100
1	Appenzell Ausserrhoden	1	53 200
1	Nidwalden	1	38 600
2	Glarus	1	38 300
2	Uri	1	35 000
1	Obwalden	1	32 700
1	Appenzell Innerrhoden	1	15 000

The former half-cantons

Six cantons, which had once formed a single entity and then subsequently divided, used to be considered half-cantons. These were Obwalden and Nidwalden which divided even before 1291, the two Appenzells which divided in 1597 on religious grounds, and Basel which saw one part break away from the town in 1833.