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Cover picture:
A budding Swiss citizen peaks into the Parliament
Building – not the recently renovated original in Bern,
but the 1:25 model at the Swiss miniature exhibition
in Melide, Ticino
One of the most exciting moments in Swiss politics has to be the Federal Council elections, as things very often come down to every last vote. Following the election of a new member of government by the United Federal Assembly on 10 December 2008, it is worth looking back at the colourful history of these elections: It took over 130 years for the first woman to be elected to the Federal Council in 1984. Today I am pleased to say that there are three women in the Federal Council. When our federal state was founded in 1848, the Federal Council consisted entirely of members of the Free Radical Party. It was only in 1891 that the first Catholic-Conservative (precursor to the CVP) member joined the government. After that, it again took some time until the first representative of the Farmers’, Trades’ and Citizens’ Party (precursor to the SVP) was elected in 1929 and until a member of the Social Democratic Party was elected in 1943. It was exactly 50 years ago that the “magic formula” was established in 1959, a formula which stood for over 40 years: during that period, the Federal Council consisted of two Federal Councillors from the FDP, two from the SP, two from the CVP and one member from the SVP. In 2003 though the SVP won a seat from the CVP. That election represented a break from the past. It not only brought an end to the long-standing political composition of the government (end of the magic formula), but it was also the first time in many years that a sitting member of the Federal Council was not re-elected (this had only happened twice in the early years of the federal state [1854, 1872]). In 2007, there was a repeat when a member of the Federal Councillor, once again failed to be re-elected. In 2008 the party-political constellation altered again after the two SVP members who had been elected in 2007 shifted their allegiance to the newly created BDP (Conservative Democratic Party) following party-internal disputes. Following the elections of 10 December 2008, the SVP is once again represented in the Federal Council. All of which goes to show that Federal Council elections do not simply follow a set pattern. In the 19th century they were even referred to as a lottery. In recent years, the eve of the Federal Council elections has been termed the “night of the long knives”. One thing is certain: Federal Council elections frequently offer an element of surprise and moments of suspense.

In 2009 we will also be turning our attention to sport in the shape of the ice hockey world championship, which is being held here in Switzerland. In sport just as in politics, it is not about claiming the spotlight. It is about perseverance, teamwork, mutual respect and fair play. Only then is the contribution of each individual crowned by success. On that note I wish you a successful year and hope you enjoy reading this booklet, which will give you an insight into the country’s political workings and the Federal Authorities.

Federal Chancellor: Corina Casanova
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**The Swiss parliament**

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- Representing the 26 cantons

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2 The Swiss Confederation: a brief guide
The Swiss government

The Federal Council

ORGANISATION OF THE FEDERAL ADMINISTRATION OR

Where the 36 000-strong federal staff work

Federal Chancellery

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

Federal Department of Home Affairs FDHA

Federal Department of Justice and Police FDJP

Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport DDPS

Federal Department of Finance FDF

Federal Department of Economic Affairs FDEA

Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications DETEC

The Judiciary

THE FEDERAL COURTS OR

Federal Supreme Court

Federal Courts of first instance

The Swiss Confederation a brief guide online
The site provides additional material in the form of documents, charts, photos and videos and you can even test your civic knowledge using our interactive quiz. Why not try it out at http://www.ch.ch/ebuku.
Mr Merz, what does the office of President mean to you?

It is a classic example of the burden and privilege of high office. It is an honour to be President of the Swiss Confederation, but it brings with it huge responsibilities. You have to represent the country while continuing to head a government department. As President of the Swiss Confederation it is my firm intention to ensure that there is a good atmosphere in the Federal Council.

Do you have a motto for your year as President?

I should like to give our people the assurance that we will be able to weather the difficult times ahead if we focus on our values and virtues: diligence, reliability, quality coupled with creativity and modesty. Our country’s prosperity was built on these values. If we remain true to them, we will emerge from the crisis stronger than before.

How will you be running the Federal Council?

I would like meetings to be well planned and procedures to be structured. But within these structures there must be room for creativity. Each member should be able to talk openly and put across their ideas. The Federal Council is not an easy body to chair, but you can’t get very far by adopting a commandeering tone. Any-one who thinks that the Federal Council can be run as a hierarchy is quite mistaken.

Do you think it is right and good that the SVP again has a recognised representative in the Federal Council?

Yes, this is fundamental and is at the very core of our understanding of the political system: the strongest party must be represented in a concordance government. Without concordance we will not, in the long term, be able to keep Switzerland together as a coherent whole. In view of our federalist structure and our democratic rights, we cannot afford to have a system of opposition and government.

Isn’t it a bit strange that Federal Councillors use the polite “Sie” form when addressing one another at their meetings?

No, this is not just a tradition. It goes deeper than that. Each member of the Federal Council represents a department, various offices, organisations or subsidised bodies and not just themselves. The polite form shows that each member is not simply speaking on their own behalf. We address each other as the head of a government department. When we break for lunch, however, we revert to the familiar “Du” form as we are addressing one another as individuals.

You are of course still a head of department and as such you have straightened out the federal finances. Is the financial crisis now destroying your good work?

No, you have to look at it in stages. Up to the end of 2007 we were able to reduce debt by CHF 11 billion. 2008 was a year of contrasts. The financial year ended with a surplus of CHF 5 billion, but extraordinary expenses are accruing, for example for invalidity insurance, the federal pension fund and the system change in the migration sector. In 2009 we had been expecting a surplus, but this is unlikely to materialise. At least we have not yet incurred any new debts. I am already focusing on the 2010 budget, where it will only be possible to balance revenue and expenditure with the greatest effort.

Another great concern of yours is the reform of value added tax. Do you still believe you will achieve a breakthrough with the proposed flat rate tax?

A breakthrough is still uncertain. You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it drink. Personally I think that a radical simplification of the system would be the best solution for our country. It would be a first to have the lowest flat rate in the whole of Europe. It would mean a loss of privileges for certain sectors and no-one gives those up easily.
You returned to work very soon after your illness. What is it that particularly draws you to the office of Federal Councillor?

If medicine has made such progress and succeeds, as in my case, in making people fit for work again, then the person concerned should oblige by getting back to work. That is the aim of our health care system. Furthermore, I still intend to see through a number of projects, or at least ensure that they have reached a satisfactory stage. Countless letters of encouragement also showed me that people were keen for me to return to office.

It seems that other heart patients are now coming under pressure from their employers...

I hadn’t thought of that, but it is valid for everyone: the aim of treatment is to be fit enough to go back to work. But the pace of recovery varies from person to person. Before this illness I was fit, I don’t drink or smoke, I’m not overweight and I have a healthy lifestyle. If people, on account of their previous level of fitness, need longer to get fully fit, so be it. They just have to accept that. Convalescence shouldn’t be seen as a competition!

Isn’t it a lonely life as a Federal Councillor?

Yes, it is. But we mustn’t become isolated. It must be possible to put this solitude to good use to ponder on matters.

How will you find time to take a break from the dual burden of being a head of department and President of the Swiss Confederation?

You just have to find time to relax as you go along. I for one will not be taking any long holidays this year. Every Sunday morning I go for a long walk and for me that half day is sacrosanct. I greatly enjoy those moments of solitude. Solutions to existing problems often occur to me during these walks. This is what happened when I had to restructure the Appenzell Cantonal Bank, for example. I went off on my own for three days hiking in the Engadine and thought through the consequences. By the time I got back to Herrisau, it was clear to me what needed to be done.

Will we be seeing you on the ice rink in front of the Federal Palace at some point?

Yes, I hope so. I’m quite a good ice-skater. I even used to play ice hockey. When I skate on the Bundesplatz I’ll leave the hockey stick at home though!

What criteria are used to decide what foreign trips you will be making during your presidential year?

The first port of call will be the European Union. It is customary to visit the two countries which hold the rotating presidency, this year the Czech Republic and Sweden. Occasional trips to Brussels can also help to prevent misunderstandings and disputes. Then there are our multilateral contacts, which will mean visits to the International Monetary Fund in Washington and to the UN in New York. As far as bilateral contacts are concerned, there will be working meetings at the WEF Annual Meeting in Davos and several visits by foreign heads of government in Bern.

And how will you as President of the Swiss Confederation strengthen ties with the people?

I do not have to strengthen this contact as it is already strong enough. I go shopping every Saturday, and I know about people’s everyday concerns. I have no intention of artificially mingling with the crowds. That is not the way to find out about people’s everyday concerns. There is also a risk that people have a tendency to generalise based on such one-off contacts. That is not what I want, so you won’t be seeing any stage-managed events while I am President.

Politics, as we know, is not all there is to life. What else is particularly important to you?

Culture in the broadest sense: this started while I was a young boy at school and, looking back, I have to say that I was very much interested in the arts. Now certain things have had to be put on hold due to time constraints,
but I make it my business to read a lot, and for 51 years without a break I have had a season ticket for the theatre in St. Gallen.

Is it true that you always carry the Bible and Goethe’s Faust around with you?

It is indeed. I started doing this in the 1980s in Latin America because I sometimes travelled in countries where people were occasionally taken hostage. Business people were often among those kidnapped and only released on payment of a ransom. I had to face the fact that this could very well happen to me, too. So I was prepared for this scenario: these two books are the ones which would help me hold out the longest. I still carry them round today in a secret compartment in the lining of my briefcase. They are small India-paper books. Not only are they always with me but I also read the Bible quite often, particularly the poetry in Job or Psalms. They pretty much contain all the words of wisdom you need in daily life.

What would you like to have achieved at the end of your year as President?

In view of the looming crisis, I should like to be able to say: we have spared our country from major harm by taking the right decisions at the right time using the right means. But I am only one part of a complex system. I must simply try, as first among equals to guide the Federal Council along this path.

Do you already have plans for life after the Federal Council?

I often spent time abroad on business but was unfortunately unable to see many of the sights and I would like to make up for that. I should like to visit Latin America again. And the Far East, China and Japan also interest me. Most of all, however, I would like to immerse myself in the arts again – that will be wonderful!

How would you describe yourself in terms of your strengths and weaknesses?

My strength is at the same time also my weakness. If I had to have a psychological assessment, the psychologist would probably say I had a “dissipated personality”. That is, a person with a broad range of interests. The opposite of this would be, for example, a banker who collects coins in the evening after work. A dissipated person, on the other hand, has many interests and runs the risk of spreading himself too thin. Fragmentation, then, would be the weakness.

You eat a lot of dried fruit and drink green tea...

The green tea wasn’t really deliberate. On my first day at work, my assistant asked me if I would like a coffee. As I was already quite agitated, I asked him for a herbal tea, but all he had was green tea. Then, for the next four years, he never asked me if I wanted a coffee, but just brought me green tea instead. I’ve even started to get a taste for it!
Other religious communities

Religion

- Roman Catholic: 63.6%
- Protestant: 10.4%
- Muslim: 3.1%
- Other religious communities: 10.2%
- None: 11.3%
- No details: 0.8%

Demographics

- 7,593,494 inhabitants, of which 1,402,093 are foreign nationals
- 90,175 emigrants
- 165,433 immigrants

Household sizes

- Single-person households: 42%
- Family households with children: 28%
- Family households without children: 30%
- Single parent with children: 2%
- Other: 8%

Household expenditure

- Food and alcohol-free beverages: 21.3%
- Clothing and shoes: 10.3%
- Other expenditure: 5.1%
- Housing (including energy): 4.3%
- Other: 15.8%

Income (net monthly, full-time employed)

- >8000.-: 16.1%
- 7001–8000.-: 7.3%
- 6001–7000.-: 11.7%
- 5001–6000.-: 19.5%
- 4001–5000.-: 25.7%
- <3000.-: 2.9%
- 3001–4000.-: 16.3%

Employment rate: 82.3%

- Agriculture and forestry: 2.9%
- Industry and commerce: 6.9%
- Services: 76.6%

Language regions

- Main language spoken by the majority:
  - French: 28.4%
  - German: 63.7%
  - Italian: 0.5%
  - Romansh: 0.5%
  - Other: 0.8%

Household by country of origin

- Italy: 14.4%
- Germany: 13.7%
- Serbia: 11.7%
- Portugal: 11.4%
- France: 6.9%
- Turkey: 4.4%
- Spain: 4.3%
- Macedonie: 4.3%
- Bosnia-Herzegovina: 3.4%
- Croatia: 1.6%
- Other European countries: 16.3%
- Other continents: 15.5%

*incl. Montenegro and Kosovo

Birthrate: 1.46 children per woman

Gainfully employed by sector

- Agriculture and forestry: 4.8%
- Industry and commerce: 6.8%
- Services: 73.6%
- Other: 22.4%
Finances

Federal revenue 2007

Direct taxes 33.8%
Indirect taxes 58.1%
VAT 33.9%
Transport levies 2.5%
Tobacco tax 3.8%
Stamp duty 5.1%
Import duty 1.8%
Mineral oil tax 8.8%
Other fiscal revenues 1.2%
Other revenues 8.2%
Withholding tax 7.3%

CHF 58 092 million

Developments in revenue (CHF million)

Confederation
Cantons
Communes

Developments in expenditure (CHF million)

Social welfare
Transport
National defence
Agriculture and food supply
Education and fundamental research
Foreign relations
Interest on debt and the share of the cantons
Other expenditure

Developments in debt (CHF million)

Confederation
Cantons
Communes

Federal expenditure 2007

Social welfare 31.4%
Interest on the debt and the share of the cantons 18.1%
Foreign relations 4.2%
Education and fundamental research 9.2%
Agriculture and food supply 6.7%
Transport 13.5%
National defence 8.0%
Other expenditure 8.8%
How long has there been a Switzerland?

1291 According to tradition, Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden renew their alliance to defend their property and rights against foreign attack on the Rütli meadow on 1 August.

Additional urban and rural areas join or are conquered by this “Confederation” in the course of the following decades and centuries.

The Swiss defend their loose federation’s growing power and freedom for two hundred years against a variety of opponents until they obtain true independence from the German empire after the Swabian War in 1499.

The abolition of mass and the introduction of communion in Zurich by Zwingli in 1525 lead to the religious division of Switzerland into Catholic and Protestant regions that live separately and time and again go to war with one another.

During the period known as the “regeneration” after 1830, the pressures of economic development cause around half of the cantons to adopt liberal constitutions that guarantee their citizens economic and political freedom. This leads to conflicts between liberal and conservative cantons.

Tensions between the liberal Protestant and the Catholic cantons lead to the civil war in 1847 (the “Sonderbundskrieg”). After a brief military campaign with federal troops, the Catholics, who had founded a separatist federation, surrender.

1848 The modern Swiss federal state is founded in 1848. Its constitution centralises and harmonises numerous areas which were previously the responsibility of the cantons, such as military service, customs, and postal services and coinage. This leads to the creation of a cohesive territory ripe for economic development.

The general right to vote and to participate in elections, but for men only, is introduced in 1848, but is ultimately regarded by many as insufficient. Swiss citizens campaign for direct democratic rights, introducing the right to call for a referendum in the revised Federal Constitution of 1874, and the popular initiative in 1891.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the various political movements organise themselves as parties. The Social Democratic Party is founded in 1888, the Free Radical Party and the Catholic-Conservative People’s Party, which is today’s CVP, in 1894.

Switzerland is spared from the First World War from 1914 to 1918, but the difficult social conditions in many sections of the population caused by the war lead to a general strike in 1918. The strikers are unsuccessful in pushing through many of their demands, such as the 48-hour working week and the introduction of old-age insurance. In that same year, however, the National Council is elected by proportional representation for the first time and now includes workers representatives. This brings the dominance of the Free Radical Party to an end.

In 1920 Switzerland accedes to the League of Nations founded the previous year, on condition that it strictly preserves its neutrality and that it is not required to participate in any military campaigns.

The global economic crisis of 1929 leads to increased unemployment and, in 1935, to the devaluation of the Swiss franc.

The agreement in the machine and metalworking industry of 1937 to ensure industrial peace, the recognition of Romansh as the fourth national language in 1938, the development of the Alps in 1940 into the Swiss military redoubt, and ultimately the first Social Democratic member of the Federal Council in 1943 contributed to Swiss cohesion in difficult times. This also allows Switzerland to remain neutral in the Second World War from 1939 to 1945.

The federal Old Age and Survivors’ Insurance (AHV) is introduced in 1947.

Although it had acceded to the League of Nations a quarter of a century earlier, Switzerland does not initially accede to the United Nations (UN) when it is created in 1948 on the grounds of its neutrality.
In 1959 with the election of a second Social Democrat to the Federal Council, the composition of the government is for the first time largely proportional to the parties' shares of the popular vote. This is the origin of what is known as the "magic formula", which ensures a fair representation of the most important political parties in the Federal Council.

After an unsuccessful attempt in 1959, the people and the cantons grant women the right to vote and to participate in elections at federal level in 1971, by 621,403 “yes” to 325,596 “no” votes. In a number of cantons, women have already had equal political rights for quite some time.

Following a series of popular votes, in Canton Bern and in particular in the Bernese French-speaking districts as well as ultimately at federal level, Canton Jura is created in 1978. It separates from Bern, and becomes the 26th state of Switzerland.

In 1984, Switzerland elects a woman to the Federal Council for the first time in its history by appointing Elisabeth Kopp (FDP).

In 1989, voters reject the popular initiative to eliminate the armed forces.

In 1992, voters reject membership of the European Economic Area.

In 1999, the people and the cantons approve the totally revised Federal Constitution, which enters into force in 2000.

After being involved in many UN sub-organisations, in some cases for several decades, and as the result of a popular initiative, Switzerland becomes a full member of the United Nations in 2002.

In the same year, the first bilateral agreements with the European Union enter into force.

In December 2003, for the first time since 1854 and 1872, a member of the Federal Council is not re-elected. CVP Federal Councillor Ruth Metzler has to relinquish her seat to the SVP representative Christoph Blocher.

Four years later, Christoph Blocher experiences a similar turn of events during the 2007 winter session when the United Federal Assembly elects his party colleague Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf to the Federal Council.

She and the Graubünden cantonal party to which she belongs are subsequently excluded from the national SVP in 2008. She joins the newly-formed BDP. It is the first time that such a small grouping has been represented in government.

The Grauholz monument with its broken column commemorates the fall of the Old Confederation in 1798. Its inscription urges future generations to "Live in unity."
A UNIQUE POLITICAL SYSTEM OR
Swiss democracy
As in eighty per cent or so of communes, the electorate of Le Lieu are called on at least once a year to discuss local matters and take decisions.

However, as in most places, only a minority actually exercise their direct democratic rights. Here in the town hall, which is just across the road from the church (see photo on following page), a mere 29 of the town’s 629 eligible voters met in spring 2008 to discuss and agree on the annual financial accounts and the development of a district and to elect new members to sit on various committees.

The fact that the vast majority have not come forward can be taken several ways: either that they are satisfied with the work of the elected representatives on the communal council and tacit agreement with the decisions of their fellow-citizens; or as a lack of commitment to the place in which they live and a subsequent lack of interest in local politics; or they may even dislike or be afraid of expressing their opinions and nailing their colours to the mast in public.
Switzerland is a nation of consensus, composed of several ethnic groups with a variety of languages and religions. It has been a federal state since 1848. There are 23 federal states worldwide; Switzerland is the second oldest after the United States of America. Switzerland is a federal state and is organised in three political levels: the communes, the cantons and the Confederation.

2636 communes Communes are the smallest political units in Switzerland. There are currently 2636 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 communal parliament.

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 services, 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. Canton Jura is an exception. It is the only canton that was created in the 20th century. On 1 January 1979, it separated from Canton Bern to become a canton in its own right.

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 58 and 180 members, who are all elected by the people, in most cantons by a system of proportional representation.

The 5 or 6-member governments are also all elected by the people; in 24 cantons by a simple majority system, while in Zug and Ticino the cantonal council is elected by proportional representation.

Direct democracy in the form of a People’s Assembly still exists only in Appenzell Innerrhoden and Glarus. In all the other cantons, the people vote exclusively at the ballot box.

This place is called Le Lieu (literally, “the place”) and it lies in the Joux valley in the canton of Vaud close to the French border. With its 831 inhabitants, Le Lieu is one of the smaller communes in the canton. Well over a thousand people lived here a hundred years ago, but since then the population has continually fallen until it reached its lowest point during the watch industry crisis of the 1970s.

Five hundred years ago iron was mined here; then, around the middle of the 18th century, metal working was replaced by the watch industry, which even now remains the most important trade sector. There is little agriculture in this part of the Jura region.

The road from Les Diablerets over the Pillon pass to Gsteig in Saanenland crosses several borders – a geographical border: the main European water shed between the Rhône and the Rhine; a linguistic border: from French-speaking to German-speaking Switzerland; and a political border: from Canton Vaud to canton Bern, a region which for some three hundred years was subject to the rule of the other: from the conquest in 1476 to the downfall of the old Confederation in 1798, the valley of Les Ormonts was ruled by canton Bern.
1 Confederation is the name given to the Swiss state. CH is the abbreviation of Switzerland’s official Latin name “Confoederatio Helvetica”. Confoederatio 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 highest political unit, i.e. the cantons.
Switzerland is virtually the only country in the world where the people have such extensive decision-making powers. The longstanding democratic tradition, but also the comparatively small size of the population and the country, as well as a high literacy rate and sophisticated media services are crucial to the operation of this particular system of government. Swiss nationals have the following political rights at federal level:

**Elections** or accumulating votes, vote splitting and crossing out votes 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 appoint 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 changed in three different ways, which may be combined:
  - Firstly, names can be struck off 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 may also specify 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 mental 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 only put to the vote if required by an optional referendum. A popular majority is sufficient for such a proposal to be accepted.

**Voter turnout in National Council elections since 1919**

Voter turnout has fallen significantly since the first National Council elections using the system of proportional representation were held in 1919. The two main reasons for the comparatively low voter turnout in Switzerland are firstly that voters have frequent opportunities to express their views at the ballot box, not only in elections, but also in votes at communal, cantonal and federal levels. Secondly, elections are not that decisive in this country because power-sharing understandings between the main parties preclude any change of government. Since the introduction of postal voting in 1994, there has been a slight increase in voter participation.

**Voter turnout in federal votes since 1971**

Voter turnout in recent years has averaged slightly over 40 per cent. Some proposals have drawn far more voters to the polling stations, such as the people’s initiative for Switzerland without an Army (1989), which brought a 69% turnout and membership of the European Economic Area EEA (1992), which saw 78% of the electorate vote. Because Swiss citizens regularly have the opportunity to take part in decision making on political matters and other important issues, votes are more important in Switzerland than elections. Parliament in Switzerland has less influence than parliaments in countries that do not have direct democratic instruments.
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 a new amendment.

For such an initiative to be accepted, 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 a 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 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.

Referendums or Voicing disagreement The People are entitled to pronounce on parliamentary decisions after the event.

Federal legislation, decisions of parliament and certain international treaties 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 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. Referendums also contribute to political agreement because they prompt parliament to include as many interested parties as possible in the debate on new laws or legislative amendments and thereby allow a compromise to be reached that is supported by a majority, and which is unlikely to fall victim to an optional referendum later on.

Petition

Everyone – not just those eligible to vote – is entitled to address written requests, suggestions and complaints to the authorities. 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.

Popular initiatives adopted and rejected since 1971

Of a total of 116 popular initiatives that were voted on over the past 30-40 years, only nine saw a large turnout at the ballot box – i.e. not even one out of ten. The vast majority of initiatives achieved less than 50% votes in favour and were rejected. Most of these initiatives are not, however, entirely ineffective. The concerns they address often give rise to broad debate and are eventually translated, at least partially, into new laws.

Optional referendums since 1971

Since 1971, referendum committees have been successful on 91 occasions. They have forced popular ballots on federal acts and decrees approved by parliament that they did not agree with, and have won the day 29 times at the ballot box, which amounts to an almost one in three level of success. The chart shows the percentage in favour at each of the different votes: less than 50% implies that the disputed legislation was rejected.
The four strongest political parties...

Political parties are groupings of like-minded people that have their own philosophies of life — in other words, particular views on political, social and economic issues, etc. They act as a link between the people and the institutions of the state and are essential for the functioning of a democracy. The party landscape in Switzerland is as varied as the country. Normally speaking the four strongest parties together constitute the government. However, because a grouping broke away from the SVP (Swiss People’s Party) in 2008 to form the Conservative Democratic Party BDP and Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, who was elected to the Federal Council as an SVP member, joined the new party, the strongest party is currently underrepresented in the Federal Council. All twelve parties provide a brief self-portrait on the following pages.

**SVP**

**Swiss People’s Party**

- **Party President:** National Councillor Toni Brunner
- **National Councillor:** founded in 1917
- **Web site:** wwwsvp.ch

The party was formed in 1971 from the union of the Swiss Farmers, Trade and Citizen's Party (BGB) and the Democratic Parties of the Cantons of Glarus and Graubünden and, with a 29% share of the vote, is Switzerland’s strongest party. The SVP result in the parliamentary elections in 2007 was the best that any single party has ever achieved.

With the election of Ueli Maurer to the Federal Council on 10 December 2008, the SVP once again became part of the national government. However, given its support among the electorate, the party is underrepresented with only one Federal Councillor.

**Our election promise – a “contract with the people”**

The SVP is firmly committed to the concerns of its voters. The party stands for an independent, neutral Switzerland, a streamlined state, low taxes, a strong location for business with secure jobs and effective prevention of crime and of abuse of asylum and social security system. The main points of the SVP’s agenda for the current legislature were set out at a party conference in its “Contract with the people”:

- **We do not wish to join the European Union**
- **We want to deport criminal foreign nationals**
- **We want to lower taxes for all**

With this clear policy based on conservative values, the SVP wants to ensure prosperity for our country, jobs and a secure future in a free society.

**SP**

**Swiss Social Democratic Party**

- **Party President:** National Councillor Christian Levrat
- **National Councillor:** founded in 1888
- **Web site:** www.spschweiz.ch

The SP promotes social security and the fair distribution of wealth. All children deserve the same opportunities and prospects. Purchasing power for employees, families and people with low and middle incomes must be increased. As the party of modernisation, the SP seeks to shape the future: with Micheline Calmy-Rey and Moritz Leuenberger in the Federal Council, our successful local governments together with a large number of committed people throughout Switzerland.

**The SP focuses on three main areas:**

- **Social justice:** The SP advocates secure pensions and appropriate support to people who are unable to make ends meet. The SP is therefore committed to the provision of adequate unemployment and invalidity benefits. We firmly believe in equal opportunities: with day-care centres and kindergartens, apprenticeship places for all and a good work-life balance.
- **Purchasing power:** The SP is committed to an increase in purchasing power. Our mission is to have sufficient wages, pensions and child allowances to ensure a decent living coupled with affordable health insurance and lower rents.
- **Energy supplies:** CO₂ emissions have to be reduced by 30% by 2020. With partial earmarking of the CO₂ tax for the modernisation of buildings and with renewable energies in place of dependence on oil and gas, the SP will oppose new plans for nuclear power stations.
On 1 January 2009 the Radical Free Democratic Party FDP Switzerland and the Swiss Liberal Party joined forces to become the FDP – The Liberals, thereby creating the youngest party in Switzerland with the longest tradition.

FDP – The Liberals is the family party that stands for freedom of choice and achievement. It advocates freedom, individual initiative, competition, personal responsibility for a society with equal opportunities for all. The liberal values of personal responsibility and modesty ensure support for a liberal society. The FDP – The Liberals are against paternalism, excess regulation, prohibitions, dependence on the state, social abuse and indifference.

The FDP – The Liberals focus on three areas:

• We want to create the conditions for more and better jobs in order to cope well when times are hard
• We want to strengthen national cohesion and ensure solid social services. This is the only way to stop the fragmentation of society.
• We want to create a streamlined, open state. Our state has the wrong priorities – too much red tape and a cumbersome bureaucracy.

The CVP focuses on three main areas:

• Switzerland as a business location with innovative strengths, attractive tax incentives, excellent infrastructure and a high standard of education. This policy ensures jobs and prosperity.
• Family values: families will benefit from improved conditions in which to bring up and care for their children, above all, to achieve a better balance between working and family life.
• Safeguarding the social security system: funding social institutions is the main challenge for the next 20 years. This can only be accomplished through targeted reforms and by avoiding unrealistic expansion or cutbacks.
20 The Swiss Confederation a brief guide

...as well as the eight other political parties in parliament

GPS
Swiss Green Party
2 members of the Council of States (m)
10 National Councillors (f) and 10 National Councillors (m)

The Swiss Green Party is the largest party that does not have a seat in the Federal Council. With the founding of a Green Party section in Obwalden at the end of 2008, the party is now represented in every canton. Green Parties are represented in the governments of seven cantons and over 20 towns. The GPS is committed to preserving the environment, to a sustainable economy, social justice and international solidarity. Our goals for this legislature are: efficient climate protection and the abandonment of the use of nuclear power, the reorganisation of the economy along more environmental lines, the strengthening of social institutions and an active peace policy.

BDP
Conservative Democratic Party
1 Federal Councillor (f)
1 National Councillor (m)
2 National Councillors (f) and 2 National Councillors (m)

Founded in 2008, the BDP is the youngest Federal Council party. The cantonal parties of Bern, Glarus and Graubünden were founded in the summer of 2008. What triggered the founding of the BDP was the exclusion of the entire Graubünden SVP section by the Swiss SVP. As a result of resentment regarding this decision and to protest against the political naivety of such in-fighting, other cantonal and communal sections were also founded. The BDP advocates a conservative policy where any subject can be discussed freely and where there is no personality cult. The party is represented in the Federal Council by Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf.

GLP
Swiss Green Liberal Party
1 member of the Council of States (f)
1 National Councillor (f) and 2 National Councillors (m)

Environment: people depend on a well preserved environment as the very basis for their existence. We want to leave a thriving world behind without contaminated land so that future generations can also enjoy life.

Finance: the state should operate as an effective service company focused on core tasks. It should not be burdened by debt, but should rely on the personal responsibility of all individuals.

Social issues: the top priority is to encourage personal contributions, a sense of responsibility and solidarity. Support measures should be appropriate and incentive-based and yet respect human dignity.

EVP
Swiss Evangelical People’s Party
2 National Councillors (m)

Better support for families: the EVP aims to relieve the financial burden on families and where necessary to support them. The EVP therefore promotes child benefits that would replace all other payments or deductions and be financed by taxes.

A fair economy: in other words, debt reduction, fair minimum and maximum wages, a simple tax system without loopholes and fair trade.

A healthy environment: the EVP intends to quickly reduce Switzerland’s dependence on non-renewable energy sources. It therefore promotes the introduction of environmentally friendly tax reforms and a CO2 charge on transport fuel.
The graph is based on the 924 votes in the first year of the 2007-2011 legislative period and shows the position, i.e. voting behaviour of individual members of parliament.

**CSP**

**Christian Social Party**

- **Party President:** Monika Bloch Süss
- **1500 members**
- **Founded in 1997**
- [www.csp-gcs.ch](http://www.csp-gcs.ch)

Our policy is primarily aimed at safe and dignified lives for everyone. Our work focuses on sustainable activities for a well preserved environment, good educational opportunities, secure jobs and pensions. We feel ourselves responsible, along with others, for what happens at home and in the world at large. Our party is synonymous with solidarity and tolerance.

In a nutshell, this means: promotion of a sustainable energy policy (for example, no new nuclear power stations), a socially responsible economy, good schools and traineeships, jobs for all, reliable social services and an active peace policy.

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**EDU**

**Federal Democratic Union**

- **Party President:** Hans Moser
- **2500 members**
- **Founded in 1975**
- [www.edu-schweiz.ch](http://www.edu-schweiz.ch)

True values and plain talking! The EDU seeks sustainable solutions and in its commitment to God, it promotes a free and constitutional Switzerland. The EDU does not follow the zeitgeist or the mainstream, but adheres to fundamental values, the word of God and the creation of the world and of mankind according to the Bible. The EDU encourages people to assume responsibility for their actions. The focal points of our policy include protection of human life at every stage of its existence as well as the environment and the private sphere, traditional marriage and family values, education and the labour market in Switzerland, balanced finances and debt reduction.

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**Lega**

**Ticino League**

- **Party President:** Giuliano Bigmasca
- **1500 members**
- **Founded in 1991**
- [www.legaticinesi.ch](http://www.legaticinesi.ch)

**Independence:** economic and political globalisation is weakening Switzerland. Switzerland can however hold its own in a fragmented Europe if it safeguards its independence and its freedom.

**Public services:** the federal government must maintain its public services and ensure equal conditions for all people throughout the country. Privatisations should be avoided whenever possible.

**Mobility:** Ticino needs better connections to the rest of the country. The Gotthard route is stretched to capacity. Natural hazards and structural problems are jeopardising unlimited use of this route.

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**PdA**

**Workers’ Party**

- **Party President:** Nelly Rantschu
- **2000 members**
- **Founded in 1944**
- [www.pda.ch](http://www.pda.ch)

The PdA intends to work with all forces who oppose capitalism to free humankind from exploitation and oppression. It supports all people and movements that believe that a better world is possible and that are working towards achieving that goal. The PdA’s commitment knows no frontiers, because its fight against injustice is worldwide.

PdA activists are present at all levels of Swiss politics and share a common goal, which is to make proposals to create a solidarity-based society, to promote personal development for all people and to protect the environment – in short, to create a genuinely socialist society.
THE LEGISLATURE: NATIONAL COUNCIL AND COUNCIL OF STATES OR

The Swiss parliament
The word “parliament” is derived from the Latin parlare, to speak. Delivering speeches and, above all, listening to them is part of the daily routine of the 246 members of the Federal Assembly. If they need to have an informal chat, whether with colleagues, lobbyists, journalists or a guest, they enjoy meeting at the “reading room” café on the bel-étage level of the Parliament Building.

The café with a bar, some bar tables and seating, is only a few steps away from the chambers of the National Council and the Council of States and from the committee conference rooms. That and the television screens broadcasting the progress of events from both chambers ensures that deputies can quickly retake their seats if necessary and join in the ongoing debate. This popular meeting place did originally used to be the newspaper reading room. It was converted into a café in 1938.
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 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. 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. In both instances, it is the cantons that are the electoral constituencies.

The people are represented in the National Council

The large chamber has 200 seats. The number of deputies from a canton depends on its population as recorded in the last census: for every 37,800 inhabitants or so, there is one member on the National Council. However, because the Federal Constitution guarantees one seat per canton, Appenzell Innersoden, which has only around 15,000 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.
Proportional representation or majority vote

Seats are allocated in the National Council according to the system of proportional representation. It is called this because the seats are allocated in proportion to the share of votes cast.

In National Council elections, the votes for each party are counted first, as they determine the number of seats that a party is allocated. Then the candidates with the most votes within the parties are elected.

Of course an election by proportional representation only works if there is more than one seat to be allocated. In cantons with only one seat on the National Council there is a majority vote (first past the post): the person with the most votes is elected.

With the exception of canton Jura, elections to the Council of States are also held in all cantons according to the first-past-the-post system. This procedure naturally favours large parties or leading figures with a high public profile. Minorities go away empty-handed.
Members of the National Council or representing Switzerland’s 7.5 million inhabitants

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Years in Office</th>
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<td>Filippo Leutenecker</td>
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The Swiss Confederation: A brief guide
The captions below the names refer to (from left to right) political party affiliation, year of birth, year of election to the Council and the committees (see pp 34–35) on which the council members sit. The numbering of members of the National Council from 1 to 200, and of the Council of States from 1 to 46 (see over) is intended as an aid; it can also be found on the pages showing the chamber seating plan (29–31) and on those with the committees (34 and 35).
MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF STATES OR

Representing the 26 cantons

Why some cantons only have one seat on the Council of States
Six cantons which once formed three entities and then subsequently divided used to be considered half-cantons.
These are Obwalden and Nidwalden, which divided well before the founding of the Swiss Confederation in 1291, Appenzell, which divided in 1597 on religious grounds into Catholic Innerhoden and Protestant Ausserrhoden, and Basel which suffered a violent split in 1833: the rebellious Basel Landshaft broke away from the once dominant Basel Stadt.
This is why these cantons only have one seat in the Council of States and only half a cantonal vote in votes on amendments to the Swiss Constitution.
Other rules apply to Swiss people living abroad

Swiss citizens living abroad have the option of being registered in Switzerland on the electoral roll either in their home commune or in their former commune of residence. This gives them the right to vote and take part in elections at federal level and even to be elected to the National Council.

However, depending on where they are registered, Swiss people living abroad may or may not be able to take part in elections to the Council of States, depending on what their cantonal law provides.

Swiss people living abroad only have full political rights in ten cantons where they can take part in National Council and Council of States elections and can also have their say on federal and cantonal matters. These cantons are Bern, Fribourg, Geneva, Graubünden, Jura, Schwyz, Solothurn, Ticino, Basel Landschaft and Neuchâtel: in the last two cantons they are even allowed to have a say in the affairs of the commune.

You can find out who said what in the National Council and Council of States in the Official Bulletin – www.parlament.ch
Number of voting papers distributed: 246

The two Councils meet in the National Council Chamber 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. The members of the Council of States take their seats at the back of the Chamber.
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 propose 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.

**Part-time politicians**

The 246 members of the National Council and the Council of States devote an average of 60% 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. (See also “How new laws are made” on pages 38/39)

**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 of the Swiss Confederation and the Vice-President of the Federal Council from among the seven members of the Federal Council.

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.

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**Sessions in 2009**

- Spring session: 2 – 20 March
- Summer session: 25 May – 12 June
- Autumn session: 7 – 25 September
- Winter session: 23 November – 11 December
  (2 December: election of the President of the Confederation and the Vice-President of the Federal Council)
- Special session: 27 – 30 April
**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. All legislative work takes place in a committee. Parliamentary initiatives are subject to a preliminary examination.

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 can also require the Federal Council to present a report on another issue. 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.

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**Between 0 and 120 parliamentary requests per person**

In the last four years, members of the National Council and the Council of States submitted a total of 5748 parliamentary requests, broken down into:

- 361 parliamentary initiatives
- 1476 motions
- 636 postulates
- 1548 interpellations
- 669 simple enquiries and
- 1375 written questions as part of question time in the National Council.

This amounts to an average of 20 requests per member, although some achieve several times this number. One member submitted over 120 interventions, while other members have submitted only one or none at all after eight years in parliament.
Committees are responsible for preparing items of business and formulating recommendations for their respective Council. They work closely with the Federal Council. In accordance with the Parliament Act, the committees should also monitor social and political developments in their fields of expertise and make proposals as to how new challenges could be tackled and problems solved.

Who does what and where
Both chambers each have twelve standing committees: two supervisory committees and ten 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.

Work and importance of committees
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 who have been unable to voice their concerns in the committee can subsequently submit minority proposals at the plenary session.

The councils tend to deal with their own committees’ proposals; the most important principles to be followed are therefore set out in the advisory committees.

Supervisory committees and delegations
The Finance Committees 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 scrutinise 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 NRLA Supervisory Delegation carries out overall parliamentary supervision of the construction of the New Rail Link through the Alps (NRLA).

The Control Committees exercise overall parliamentary supervision. They fulfil their tasks by carrying out inspections and visiting agencies, commissioning the Parliamentary Administration Control to carry out evaluations, reviewing the reports on Federal Council business, the business of the federal courts and the annual reports of other bodies given tasks by the Confederation (Swiss Federal Banking Commission, the Federal Institutes of Technology, etc.). They deal with supervision requests submitted by third parties and follow up implementation of recommendations and other parliamentary interventions addressed to the Federal Council. The control committees are divided into sub-committees. In addition, each committee selects three members from its group to form the Control Delegation (GPDel) whose task it is to scrutinise activities relating to state protection and the intelligence services.

The committees meet on average for three to four days every quarter.

The numbers on the coloured circles in the table denote the corresponding members of the National Council and the Council of States (see pp. 26–28); the first two persons listed are the chairperson and deputy respectively, and the remaining committee members classified by party affiliation; *vacant.
Legislative committees
The ten legislative committees are responsible for legislation in their particular fields, for example:
Foreign Affairs Committees: international relations, neutrality, humanitarian aid, human rights, foreign economic / trade policy, European integration, World Bank, IMF
Science, Education and Culture Committees: science, education, genetic engineering, languages, culture, sport, family issues, youth issues, women's issues
Social Security and Health Committees: social insurance, health matters, drugs, food, sickness and accident prevention, health and safety
Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy Committees: environment protection, national heritage, spatial planning, water supply and regulation, energy, forestry, hunting and fishing.
Defence Committees: military defence, civil defence, national economic supply, peace and security policy, civilian service, war material export
Transport and Telecommunications Committees: transport and traffic, postal services and telecommunications, media
Economic Affairs and Taxation Committees: national economy, labour, social partnership, prices, consumer protection, private insurance, export risk guarantee, taxation, agriculture.
Political Institutions Committees: 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: civil code, code of obligations, intellectual property, fair trading, data protection, criminal law, military criminal law, parliamentary/ immunity, amnesty
Committee for Public Buildings: civilian public buildings at home and abroad

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<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Council of States</th>
<th>National Council</th>
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<td>3 Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC)</td>
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<td>4 Committee for Science, Education and Culture (CSEC)</td>
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<td>5 Committee for Social Security and Health (CSSH)</td>
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<td>6 Committee for the Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy (CESPE)</td>
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<td>7 Defence Committee (DefC)</td>
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<td>8 Committee for Transportation and Telecommunications (CTT)</td>
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<td>9 Committee for Economic Affairs and Taxation (CEAT)</td>
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<td>10 Political Institutions Committee (PIC)</td>
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<td>11 Committee for Legal Affairs (CLA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Committee for Public Buildings (CPB)</td>
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Other committees
The Drafting Committee revises the wording of the laws in the three official languages and decides on their final version.
The Committee on Pardons and Conflicts of Jurisdiction examines requests for pardons submitted to the Federal Assembly and rules on conflicts of jurisdiction between the highest federal authorities. It also has the power to grant pardons.
The Rehabilitation Committee quashes convictions against persons who helped refugees to flee persecution during the period of National Socialism.

The Judicial Committee is responsible for the preparation of the election and the removal from office of members of the federal courts.

Delegations
Delegations are mainly called on to cultivate relations with other states; otherwise, they represent the Federal Assembly at international parliamentary assemblies relating, for example, to the Council of Europe, Francophonie, the OSCE or NATO.
Parliamentary groups comprise members of the same party or parties sharing the same political sympathies. They play an important role in opinion-forming processes, discussing important Council business and agreeing on a line that can be followed by Council members in the Council and 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, belonging to a parliamentary group is a prerequisite for membership of a committee.

This is why parties with fewer than five members are keen to join a 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 impact on Council business.

Politically speaking, the Federal Assembly is not divided into parties but into parliamentary groups of which there are currently five. Seven members of parliament do not belong to a parliamentary group.

### Money paid for a job done
Parliamentary groups are paid a fixed allowance of CHF 94,500 a year, and each of their members receives the additional sum of CHF 17,500. Members of parliament with no affiliation to a parliamentary group do not receive any of this money and are not entitled to sit on a parliamentary committee or have their say in most debates.
Parliamentary Services support the Federal Assembly in the fulfilment of its tasks. They provide a comprehensive service to assist members of parliament in carrying out detailed and creative legislative work. They plan and organise parliamentary sessions and committee meetings, handle secretarial business and prepare reports, minutes and transcripts, and translations, obtain and archive documents and advise and provide technical assistance to Council members in matters related to parliamentary procedure. Parliament’s backoffice employs 293 staff who share 197 full-time positions under the leadership of the Secretary-General.

The General Secretariat is responsible for planning the sessions and any related business, and for organisational and procedural matters.

The Central Secretariat is parliament’s general service office. It makes the basic preparations for parliamentary work, manages addresses and compiles lists.

The Information Service maintains contacts with the media, in particular with accredited journalists, and with the general public. It also supports and advises council members, the parliamentary bodies and the heads of service on information and media-related matters.

The Public Relations Service produces communication material on parliament and organises events and guided tours of the Parliament Building. Together with the Federal Chancellery, it also runs the “Political Forum of the Confederation” in the Käfigturm.

The Internet Service maintains the parliament website and offers information on a daily basis on the workings of parliament and its various bodies. During parliamentary sessions, it broadcasts the debates.

The Legal Service provides advice and information on questions of parliamentary law.

The service centre for the Federal Assembly

The Document Centre is able to provide the information members of parliament need to prepare material for council decisions or debates.

External Relations and Information

The External Relations Service is the secretariat of the Foreign Affairs Committee and Delegations. It also organises foreign trips for members of parliament and visits to Switzerland by delegations from foreign parliaments, and is responsible for questions of protocol.

The Language Service provides translations for parliament and the Parliamentary Services. The Interpreting Service ensures simultaneous translation of the statements made by members of parliament into the three official languages (German, French and Italian).

Resources, Security and Logistics

The Personnel Service implements personnel policies and is the contact for training and organisational development.

The Finance and Travel Service is responsible for the preparation and the administration of the budget, accounting and controlling. It arranges for the allowances to be paid to members of parliament and organises their trips.

The Security and Infrastructure Service ensures compliance with security measures, plans and coordinates the use of the building and maintains the rooms and the technical infrastructure in the Parliament Building.

The IT and New Technologies team is responsible for operating and maintaining the entire IT infrastructure used by the Parliamentary Services and the parliamentary groups’ secretariats. It provides all members with personal IT equipment.

The Operations and Usher Service is responsible for the infrastructure of the federal chambers, committees and the parliamentary groups. The ushers are available to the chambers at all times during meetings. They also accompany Council Presidents to public events.

The Project and Integration Management Unit is responsible for tasks in the areas of infrastructure, security, IT, document management and e-parl. The e-parl project aims to make all documents necessary for the operations of the councils fully available on the Internet.
Regaining control of Invalidity Insurance

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 twelve years or more. However, the number of new acts has significantly increased in recent years. On average, every week sees a new act come into force or an existing act amended. Below are the steps that were needed to reach the fifth revision of the Federal Act on Invalidity Insurance (IV):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>When</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The first step is taken when someone thinks it is necessary for there to be a new act or for an existing act to be amended. This may be a member of the public or an interest group, members of parliament or sections of the administration, cantons or the Federal Council.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The case in question involved two parliamentary bodies: The National Council Committee for Social Security and Health NC-CSSH, and The Council of States Committee for Social Security and Health CS-CSSH. Both submitted motions during the consultation procedure for the fourth IV revision: one at the end of 2002, and the other at the beginning of 2003. They called for a limit to be placed on the increase in the invalidity ratio, i.e. for the number of people drawing a pension as a percentage of the population as a whole, to be restricted. If this ratio continued to increase, the Federal Council would have to examine the effectiveness of the measures of the fourth IV revision and take additional measures.</td>
<td>NC-CSSH CS-CSSH 4.11.2002 20.2.2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>As the 2003 ratio had again increased and there was no sign of improvement for the foreseeable future, the Federal Council decided in 2004 to tackle the fifth IV revision immediately.</td>
<td>Federal Council 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Federal Council instructed the Federal Social Insurance Office FSIO to draw up a draft bill in consultation with the other offices concerned.</td>
<td>FSIO 2004</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>This draft bill was approved by the Federal Council on 24 September 2004.</td>
<td>Federal Council 24.9.2004</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>The draft was then put out for consultation among the cantons, federal courts, political parties, business federations and other interest groups, which were then all able to submit their comments and propose amendments. There were around 140 submissions.</td>
<td>Various 2004</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>The Federal Social Insurance Office FSIO summarised the proposals from the consultation process in a report and drafted a dispatch on the fifth IV revision.</td>
<td>FSIO 2005</td>
</tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>The National Council Committee for Social Security and Health NC-CSSH met to hear a number of experts on 5 and 6 September 2005. It then unanimously decided to proceed with the fifth IV revision.</td>
<td>NC-CSSH 5/6.9.2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The National Council discussed the fifth IV revision in the spring session in 2006. There was general consensus that the Act needed revising but there was some debate about the question of funding. The Council therefore decided to rule on this matter at a later date. Only minor amendments were made to the Federal Council’s draft. After a 14-hour consultation procedure over three days, the National Council accepted the revision on 22 March.</td>
<td>National Council 20.–22.3.2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Legislative Branch

10 Who: CS-CSSH
When: 24./25.4.2006
The Council of States Committee for Social Security and Health CS-CSSH sat on 24 and 25 April. After hearing various groups, it also unanimously decided to consider the proposal and examine it in detail.

11 Who: Council of States
When: 22.6.2006
The Council of States discussed the fifth IV revision on 22 June 2006. It also recognised the need for revision with certain reservations regarding funding. The Council of States did not differ from the National Council on the main points but added two new provisions: employers should work with the IV office to seek solutions. And the insurance should make a contribution to employers who continue to employ staff who are eligible for invalidity benefits (Article 14a para. 5). Conversely, the Council of States rejected two provisions approved by the National Council: capital aid and the adjustment of pensions paid out abroad to bring them in line with their purchasing power.

12 Who: National Council/Council of States
When: 18.9.2006
The next stage was the process of ironing out differences: the National Council stood firm on the capital aid rejected by the Council of States and rejected the new Article 14a para. 5. The Council of States then discussed the remaining differences. It attempted to accommodate the National Council’s position by changing the wording of Article 14 para. 5 and limiting the duration of support, and it re-included capital aid in the draft bill.

13 Who: National Council
When: 2.10.2006
Finally the National Council followed the decisions of the Council of States. As there were no longer any differences after fewer than three consultations, there was no need for a conciliation conference between the two chambers.

14 Who: National Council/Council of States
When: 6.10.2006
The fifth IV revision was passed on 6 October 2006 in the National Council with 118 Yes votes to 63 No votes and 3 abstentions. The Council of States also approved the revision with 35 votes for to seven votes against and two abstentions. As the Invalidity Insurance Act is only an act and does not involve an amendment of the constitution, the people do not automatically have to vote on it.

15 Who: Referendum committee
When: 17.10.2006 – 25.1.2007
However, those opposing the revision managed, within a period of 100 days, to collect enough signatures against the amendment of the act, so a referendum had to be held.

16 Who: People
When: 17.6.2007
A popular vote was held on 17 June 2007. The proposal was adopted with a 59.1% “yes” vote.

17 Who: Federal Council
When: 29.9.2007
The Federal Council decided on 29 September 2007 that the fifth IV revision would take effect at the beginning of the following year.

18 Who: Referendum committee
When: 1.1.2008
As of 1 January 2008 the amended Federal Act on Invalidity Insurance came into force.
THE EXECUTIVE: FEDERAL COUNCIL AND DEPARTMENTS OR

The Swiss government
For the first time in its hundred-and-sixty-year history, the Federal Council currently consists of members from five different parties: The exclusion last year of the canton Graubünden section of the SVP from the national party – and consequently of Federal Councillor Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf for accepting the election to the government against the wishes of her party – and the subsequent founding of the BDP means that a small grouping is also represented in the Federal Council.
The Federal Council

The Swiss government comprises the seven members of the Federal Council, who are each elected 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 or she chairs the sessions of the Federal Council and undertakes special ceremonial duties. The Federal Chancellor acts as the government’s chief of staff.

The composition of the Federal Council in terms of political parties

The diagram shows the representation of the political parties in the Federal Council since 1848 from the forty years in which its members all came from the Radical Party to the current composition.
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 implementation;
- represent the 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. It takes administrative action only in exceptional cases.

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 the 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 or her absence, by the Vice-President. They can last between one and ten 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.

Collegiality

According to Article 177 of the Federal Constitution, the Federal Council is a collegial body, in which each member has the same rights and responsibilities.

The national government convenes every Wednesday morning for ordinary meetings where members express their views on the matters at hand and pass resolutions. 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. Decisions are reached behind closed doors and must be presented in public unanimously, using the arguments that won the day in the discussions. In other words, members who do not share the opinion of the majority must nonetheless endorse the decisions of the Council as a whole.

Concordance

The phrase used to describe the way in which the Federal Council has been constituted since 1959 when the seats allocated to parties represented in the national government first corresponded roughly to their share of the vote: the SP (26.3%), the FDP (23.7%) and the CVP (23.3%) each had two seats on the Federal Council, while the SVP (11.6%) had one.

This balance remained unchanged for 44 years. The 2003 National Council elections saw the SVP gain the largest share of the vote, thereby earning them a second seat in government which they took from the CVP. However, in 2008 both SVP members of government shifted allegiance to the newly-founded BDP. Since the beginning of the year, the SVP has once again had a representative on the Federal Council in the shape of Ueli Maurer, whose seat was vacated by Samuel Schmid.
Where the 36 000-strong federal staff work

The colour coded organisational units are mostly independent, which is why information on their staff, revenue and expenditure is not included in the respective department figures.
Federal Chancellery FCh

As staff office, the Federal Chancellery monitors the business processes of the Federal Council. Before an item of business is actually tabled, it passes through a variety of stages. The Federal Chancellery plays the role of coordinator, and acts as a hub to the rest of the Federal Administration and Parliament. The Federal Chancellor is the government’s chief of staff and may propose motions to the Federal Council. The Federal Chancellery is also responsible for informing the public of the decisions taken by the Federal Council in a timely and transparent manner via the media.

For the Federal Chancellery, 2009 will be a year of consolidation and renewal. One priority will be to not only maintain the quality of the www.admin.ch and www.ch.ch internet platforms, but also to adapt to the future requirements of e-Government, i.e. the electronic communication between the state and citizens. An important part of e-Government is e-Voting. Pilot e-Voting schemes are being conducted in several cantons.

A further aim for the current year is to upgrade the system used to electronically enter official publications in the Federal Gazette and in the compilations of legislation. At the same time, all of the Federal Administration’s transactions should be processed and harmonised electronically.

Federal Chancellor Sector

The Planning and Strategy Section is responsible for the Federal Council’s political planning and accountability instruments, which include legislature planning, annual objectives, and the activity report. The section is responsible for coordinating the Federal Administration’s Forward Planning Staff and checking the most important Federal Council business for consistency with the current and planned overall policy. It also acts as a secretariat to the Conference of Secretaries-General, the highest coordination body in the Federal Administration.

The Political Rights Section ensures that the political rights that are typical to Switzerland can be exercised smoothly. It advises initiative and referendum committees, formally conducts a preliminary examination of popular initiatives, verifies petition lists, organises federal votes and elections to the National Council and monitors pilot e-Voting schemes.

The Federal Crisis Management Training (cMT) unit of the Federal Administration trains senior staff from offices, departments and the Federal Chancellery to manage crises and disasters, and conducts exercises. Supra-departmental cooperation plays an increasingly important role.

The Records and Process Management Section is responsible for mail service, for the distribution of information regarding Federal Council business and consultation procedures among the federal offices, and for the archiving of the Federal Chancellery’s documents.

The primary tasks of Internal Services include human resources, finance and accounting, information technology, events management at the von Wattenwyl Haus and the Lohn country residence, and the authentication of signatures for foreign authorities.

Federal Council Sector

The Federal Council begins its weekly session at 9 am every Wednesday in the west wing of the Federal Palace. The Section for Federal Council Affairs works together with the departments to prepare the items of business for approval by the Federal Council. It prepares an agenda, gathers the views on items of business awaiting resolution from all departments through a consultation process and submits them to the Federal Council. The protocol of decisions and individual decisions are written up after the Federal Council meeting.

The Legal Section has a control and advisory function in the legislative process and advises the departments and offices on their legislation projects. The Section screens all motions put to the Federal Council for their legal and formal accuracy. In addition, it is responsible for specific legal fields, such as administrative organisation law, consultative procedure law and official publications law.

Federal acts and ordinances must be published in the official publishing bodies to enter into force. It is the task of the Official Publications Centre to ensure that the Federal Gazette and both compilations of legislation are published swiftly and simultaneously in the three official languages (German, French and Italian). The Federal Gazette contains draft bills and decrees that parliament debates in the course of its legislative work, explanatory dispatches and Federal Council reports, referendum proposals and notices from the federal authorities. The Official Compilation of Federal Legislation (AS) is published on a weekly basis and contains the new and amended acts and ordinances. The Official Compilation of Federal Legislation (SR) is continuously updated and provides a complete overview of applicable law. The compilations of legislation are indispensable for legal practitioners, but also for many private individuals, as is evident from the some 500,000 online queries made each day.

The Central Language Services ensure, together with the Federal Office of Justice, that federal legislation and all other official publications are produced in a style of language that is accessible to the public. Through their own translations and the revision of those carried out by the offices, they help to ensure
that government communications reach all language communities at the same time and in the same manner. The language services also ensure that important government texts are published in Romansh and in English. They maintain the Termdat terminology database, which is a multilingual electronic dictionary covering a wide range of legal, administrative and other specialised fields. It is a valuable tool for communication, editing and translation. In carrying out all these activities, the language services act as the guardians of our country’s multilingualism.

**Information and Communications Sector**

Information and communication are key leadership tools for the Federal Council. Headed by the Vice-Chancellor and Federal Council spokesman, the *Information and Communications Sector* ensures, together with the relevant heads of department and their staffs, that parliament, the media and the public are continually provided with transparent information following the meetings of the Federal Council. This takes the form of press conferences that can also be viewed in real time online at [http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/conferenza](http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/conferenza), and through press releases which can be subscribed to at [www.news.admin.ch](http://www.news.admin.ch) or downloaded from [www.admin.ch](http://www.admin.ch).

In addition, it operates a media centre across the road from the Federal Palace.

The Vice-Chancellor and his team (together with the specialists from the departments and federal offices and with the support of the language services) are responsible for the explanatory notes issued by the Federal Council on popular votes at federal level.

The *e-Government Section* operates the Federal Administration’s internet portal [www.admin.ch](http://www.admin.ch) and, on behalf of the Confederation and cantons, the Swiss portal [www.ch.ch](http://www.ch.ch). It also performs certain management and coordination tasks in the area of e-Government and is involved at the forefront of the development and implementation of the Federal Administration’s 2010 Internet Strategy.

The *Communication Support Section* advises the Federal Administration on strategic and conceptual communication matters. At the same time, it also produces a wide range of print and web products (sometimes with the help of external specialists) for the departments, federal offices and the Federal Chancellery. The best known of these products is the brochure you are reading.

The *Käfigturm*, the *Political Forum of the Confederation*, primarily hosts exhibitions with political content and related discussions. In addition to media conferences, the Käfigturm organises a regular series of lectures on topical or historical subjects. Details can be found at [www.kaefigturm.admin.ch](http://www.kaefigturm.admin.ch).

**Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner**

The Commissioner monitors data processing activities by federal agencies or by private individuals and organisations. In the event of a violation, he can recommend that data processing methods be changed or discontinued. In addition, he provides advice to private individuals, federal agencies and the cantons. He advises the federal offices and departments on how to apply the principle of freedom of information, which facilitates access to official documents, and conducts mediation proceedings in the event of conflict between those applying for access to information and the offices concerned.
Where exactly is Roatan?

Roatan is the largest of the three Honduran islands in the Caribbean and is home to one of the five tourist police stations in the country. Esther Leupp makes sure that as few Swiss tourists as possible need to call on the police: She is responsible for issuing the FDFA’s travel advice.

Too few people make use of this service, despite the fact that it is more necessary than ever. Increasing numbers of people fly off to exotic holiday destinations these days totally unprepared; they book their flight and hotel online, but completely overlook basic matters such as visa regulations, compulsory vaccinations and adequate travel insurance.

People who know very little about the country and its people, who take off regardless of risk and do not speak the language, could be in for a rude awakening when they reach their dream destination: they could have an accident or fall victim to crime – or end up in jail if they happen to break strict local laws.

When drafting the travel advice (www.eda.admin.ch/reisehinweise), Esther Leupp and her team focus on safety information. They assess risks and recommend specific precautionary measures drawing on reliable sources, particularly reports from local embassies and consulates.

The advice is continuously updated if the security situation in a country changes. Esther Leupp doesn’t provide news bulletins or weather reports, but she does give a lot of useful tips – such as the old rule of thumb for eating in tropical countries: “If you can’t peel it or cook it, don’t eat it.”
The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs is responsible for safeguarding Switzerland’s interests abroad and for shaping and coordinating Swiss foreign policy. Its activities are based on the following five foreign policy goals:

• peaceful coexistence of nations
• respect for human rights and promotion of democracy
• safeguarding Swiss economic interests abroad
• alleviation of hardship and poverty in the world
• preservation of natural resources

General Secretariat

Secretary-General: Roberto Balzaretti

As the FDFA’s staff office, the General Secretariat supports the foreign minister in the management of the department. It plans and coordinates all departmental activities. It is also responsible for:

• public relations
• supervising the embassies and consulates and monitoring financial management at the central office
• achieving equal opportunities within the FDFA
• implementing the Freedom of Information Act

State Secretariat

The State Secretary is second in command in the department – after the Head of Department – and is the first person to whom the Federal Council turns to discuss matters of foreign policy. He heads the Directorate of Political Affairs and is responsible for the development and strategic planning of foreign policy and for reporting to the political authorities. The State Secretary deputises for the Head of Department when necessary, for example at meetings of the Foreign Affairs Committees of the National Council and the Council of States. He is also responsible for maintaining regular contacts with his counterparts abroad and in Bern. Important dossiers include cooperation with the UN, the development of Switzerland’s relations with the EU as well as security and peace policy.

The Integration Office, which is a joint office of the FDFA and the FDEA, reports to the State Secretariat. It coordinates relations with the European Union and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

Directorate of Political Affairs

Michael Ambühl, State Secretary and Political Affairs Director

The Directorate of Political Affairs is the central office for collecting and processing all the information needed to safeguard Swiss foreign interests. It identifies the potential areas of crisis and tension, assesses Switzerland’s options, and develops foreign policy strategies. The Directorate of Political Affairs is the office within the Department where Switzerland’s foreign policy is formulated and to which all Switzerland’s missions abroad report. The Directorate has four geographical and five thematic divisions:

• Political Affairs Division I (Europe, Council of Europe, OSCE, cross-border cooperation)
• Political Affairs Division II / The Americas
• Political Affairs Division II / Africa and the Middle East
• Political Affairs Division II / Asia-Pacific
• Political Affairs Division III (United Nations, Swiss activities in international organisations, host-state policy, Francophonie)
• Political Affairs Division IV (peace policy and human security, human rights policy, humanitarian policy and migration, Swiss Expert Pool for Civilian Peace Building)
• Political Affairs Division V (financial and economic issues; environment, transport, energy and science; cultural affairs)
• Political Affairs Division VI (service for the Swiss Abroad and policy on the Swiss Abroad, consular protection, travel information and crisis management)
• Secretariat of Political Affairs (analyses, documentation and planning; international security policy)

Directorate of Public International Law

Paul Seger, Director

International law governs the peaceful coexistence of States. A foreign policy that adheres to international rules is credible and predictable. International law is an important guideline of Swiss foreign policy.

As the “legal conscience” of the FDFA and the Swiss government’s central office for international law, the Directorate of Public International Law ensures that Switzerland meets its international legal obligations both abroad and at home. It is involved in negotiating, concluding and implementing agreements based on international law and is committed to the promotion of and compliance with international law. It is also responsible for ensuring that Swiss legal claims vis-à-vis foreign states are enforced.
The DPIL deals with a wide range of topics, including neutrality, human rights and international humanitarian law, the legal aspects of cross-border cooperation, dealing with the issue of proceeds of corruption, and shipping on the Rhine and other inland waterways.

The DPIL also coordinates foreign policy measures for combating terrorism and is responsible for relations with the Principality of Liechtenstein.

**Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)**

Switzerland contributes to the alleviation of hardship and poverty in the world, to respect for human rights, and to the promotion of democracy and the peaceful coexistence of nations, as stated in the Swiss constitution.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) implements this mission. It conducts its own programmes, supports the activities of multilateral organisations and contributes to the programmes of Swiss and international non-governmental organisations.

The SDC’s activities are divided into four specific areas:

- global cooperation
- regional cooperation
- cooperation with eastern Europe
- humanitarian aid

Global cooperation works closely with the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, regional development banks and other parties involved in multilateral development cooperation.

Regional cooperation consists of bilateral development assistance in 18 (12 from 2012) partner countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Cooperation with eastern Europe comprises Switzerland’s assistance to transition countries in the West Balkans and the Community of Independent States of the former Soviet Union (CIS) and its enlargement contribution to the new EU countries.

Humanitarian aid saves lives and alleviates suffering. During armed conflicts and in the aftermath of natural disasters, the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit provides help and supports humanitarian partner organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the World Food Programme. In addition to relief aid it provides reconstruction assistance and is involved in the area of disaster protection and prevention.

The work of the SDC focuses on ten topics: health, education, water, rule of law and democracy, migration, agriculture and rural development, business and employment, environment, conflict prevention and transformation, and economic integration.

**Directorate of Corporate Management**

The Directorate of Corporate Management has three main tasks:

- It is responsible for managing and controlling resources (human resources, finance, logistics, IT, etc.) and ensures they are used effectively to achieve the department’s goals.
- It manages the network of diplomatic and consular representations abroad. It takes measures to ensure the security of these representations and their staff, and is responsible for the communication channels and coordination between the Swiss representations abroad and the head office in Bern.
- It ensures efficient and customer-friendly consular services and creates the conditions for results-oriented management in the Swiss representations abroad.

In addition, legislation, the application of law and legal advice for the department (with the exception of questions of international law) are included in the DCM’s remit. The Swiss Government Travel Centre, which organises the official international travel arrangements for the entire federal administration, is also part of this directorate.

**Swiss diplomatic and consular missions abroad**

Some 150 missions represent Swiss interests vis-à-vis other states and international organisations and provide services to Swiss nationals and businesses abroad. The network includes embassies, general consulates, and consulates, as well as missions to multilateral bodies and SDC cooperation offices.
The peak of the Weissfluhjoch rises to 2690 metres above sea level. And a few metres above that, Franz Herzog, an electronic and service technician from the Federal Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research, is working on some equipment.

He has been commissioned by the Swiss Meteorological Institute MeteoSwiss to set the wind gauge at the top of the mast of the automatic weather station to bear exactly due north, and check and adjust the other devices if necessary.

The devices measure atmospheric humidity and temperature, short wave solar radiation that hits the earth, long range infrared radiation and daily sunshine duration. In addition, a nearby level area of roughly 50 square metres is used to measure the volume of rain or snow precipitation.

The weather station above Davos, which can only be reached using the Parsenn mountain cableway is one of around six dozen such stations spread out around the country which continually transmit data to the MeteoSwiss headquarters in Zurich.

The Weissfluhjoch station is part of the unified “SwissMetNet” established four years ago and which is due to include an additional sixty stations by 2012. This modern ground weather network makes it possible to establish accurate forecasts and issue severe weather warnings, and is essential for the long term study of climate trends in Switzerland.

In addition to SwissMetNet, MeteoSwiss also operates a pollen count network, which is important for people with allergies, as well as a phenological network to monitor cycles of vegetation growth.

Franz Herzog is one of the around 2300 federal employees at the Federal Department of Home Affairs FDHA.

Few people know about his work, but it benefits a great many people.
The General Secretariat is responsible for planning, coordination and controlling, and coordinates the decision-making process between the federal offices and the Head of Department. It provides consultancy services for the entire department. Its Legal Service is also responsible for supervising charitable 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.

Federal Office for Gender Equality FOGE
www.gleichstellung-schweiz.ch

The FOGE formulates the cultural policy of the federal government. It promotes cultural life in all its diversity and creates the conditions to ensure that it can continue to flourish. It supports creative work in the fields of film, the visual arts and design. Its tasks also include supporting and promoting the interests of the country’s various linguistic and cultural communities. It supports umbrella organisations that represent cultural interests. 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 valuable collections, including the federal art collection, and is responsible for supervising the Swiss National Library and the National Museums.

Swiss National Library NL
www.nb.admin.ch

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

Swiss Federal Archives SFA
www.bar.admin.ch

The SFA evaluates, safeguards, catalogues and raises public awareness of the Confederation’s documents. It would take 12 terabytes and a bookshelf over 50 kilometres long to hold the entire inventory, which includes original documents such as the Swiss 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 is the basis for research.

The main focus is currently to support the Federal Administration’s services. In accordance with a Federal Council Decree, the SFA supports the Federal Administration by ensuring the smooth transition to e-Government.

Swiss Meteorological Institute MeteoSwiss
www.meteoswiss.ch

In the first half of 2008, the Föhn frequently blew through Switzerland’s Alpine valleys, often bringing high winds. This often resulted in accidents and damage to property. During the subsequent accident or damage investigation by the authorities and insurance companies, MeteoSwiss provides expert assessments on the meteorological incidents in its capacity as independent government authority. MeteoSwiss also issues weather forecasts and severe weather warnings around the clock. It gives speedy and detailed information to disaster protection units, the media and the general public. MeteoSwiss operates telemetry ground stations, rainfall radars and various remote sensing instruments at over 700 locations. Complex weather models use this data to calculate forecasts up to ten days in advance.
and alleviating suffering caused by disease and accidents. The FOPH tackles issues such as epidemiology and infectious diseases, substance abuse and drug prevention, food safety, noise and radiation protection, assessment and monitoring of chemicals and toxic products, stem cell research and bioterrorism, and health and accident insurance.

Federal Statistical Office FSO www.statistik.admin.ch

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 life. It provides 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, as set out in the guidelines.

Federal Social Insurance Office FSIO www.bsv.admin.ch

Switzerland has an effective and solid social insurance system. It is an important element in upholding social peace, and therefore needs to be maintained in the future and under difficult economic conditions. The FSIO ensures the reliability of this social insurance system within its areas of responsibility and adjusts it to the new challenges: old age and survivors’ insurance (AHV), invalidity insurance (IV), supplementary benefits, occupational pension funds, compensation for loss of earnings for people on national service and women on maternity leave, and family allowances in the agricultural sector. In addition, it is responsible at 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 executive bodies and is responsible for the regular adjustment of legislation to the changing social reality. To a certain extent it is itself the authority that implements the law, as for example in the area of incentive funding for supplementary childcare. The FSIO is currently concentrating on the consolidation of Old Age and Survivors’ Insurance (amendment of the 11th revision, preliminary work on the 12th revision) and Invalidity Insurance (Additional Funding, implementation of the fifth Invalidity Insurance revision), on structural reform in occupational pension funds (improved supervision) as well as on the reorganisation of state pension funds and on the implementation of the Federal Act on Family Allowances.

State Secretariat for Education and Research SER www.edu.admin.ch

The SER is responsible for drafting and implementing federal policy in the areas of further and university education, research and space affairs. The most important education documents are the Swiss school-leaving certificate, the promotion of cantonal universities and preparation for and assessment of the implementation of the federal performance mandate in relation to the Federal Institutes of Technology ETH. The SER invests in the quality of Switzerland as a research location with resources for the Swiss National Science Foundation, academics, non-university research institutes, Switzerland’s memberships in international research organisations and cooperation in international scientific programmes.

Federal Institutes of Technology Group ETH Group www.ethrat.ch

The Federal Institutes of Technology in Zurich and Lausanne as well as four research institutes: the Paul Scherrer Institute, WSL (the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research), Empa (Swiss Federal Laboratories for Materials Testing and Research) and Eawag (Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology) achieve academic results at the highest level with roughly the 12000-strong staff and nearly 20000 students and post-graduate students as well as a 580-strong professoriate.

These institutions are grouped together under the ETH Group, which the ETH Board strategically manages in its capacity as supervisory body. The ETH Board approves and supervises the development plans, controlling and ensures coordination. It draws up estimates and accounts for the ETH Group’s budget and coordinates the management and maintenance of its real estate.

Swiss Agency for Therapeutic Products Swissmedic www.swissmedic.ch

The protection of humans and animals requires that all therapeutic products are officially monitored. Swissmedic ensures that only high-quality, safe and effective medicines are made available. Full-scale testing of therapeutic products makes it possible to identify new risks at an early stage and ensure the swift implementation of the appropriate safety measures.
How heavy is a kilo?

According to the definition, a kilogram corresponds to the mass of the standard kilogram, which has been kept in Paris since 1889. The standard kilogram is a platinum-iridium alloy cylinder measuring 39 millimetres in height and diameter.

The official Swiss copy has, as is also the case in many other countries, gained in weight over time (or the original may have lost in weight, no-one is sure which). The deviation is 73 milli-onths of a gram.

At first glance that may seem like very little, but this deviation when recorded in high precision measurements is compounded over time at the level of less precise measurements. Ultimately each weighing is dependent on this standard.

This poses a problem for precision measurement technology in the long term, which is why scientists around the world are working on establishing a new definition of the kilogram. One of those scientists is Peter Fuchs, a physicist at the Federal Office of Metrology in Wabern, who heads the “mass” laboratory.

The kilogram is the only unit of measurement that is still based on a prototype and not on a physical constant. The metre, for example, is based on the speed of light. It is defined as the distance travelled by light in a specific amount of time, which amounts to approximately a three hundred millionth of a second.

The standard metre which used to be used as the reference length is no longer in a laboratory, but a museum. It is quite possible that thanks to the research conducted by Peter Fuchs with his highly precise measuring equipment, the 120-year-old prototype kilogram could soon suffer the same fate.

Peter Fuchs is one of the around 2400 federal employees at the Federal Department of Justice and Police FDJP.

Few people know about his work, but it benefits a great many people.
Like traffic lights at a busy junction, the General Secretariat is responsible for ensuring that the various parts of the FDJP work together as a team: it coordinates business for parliament and the Federal Council; it informs the public via the media or internet of the Department’s activities; and it manages human resources and finances for the whole department.

The Information Technology Service Centre is a special unit which develops and manages security-related IT applications in the areas of justice, police and migration, such as search systems or criminal records. It is also responsible for monitoring post and telecommunications.

The Federal Office of Justice prepares decrees related to the main areas of law, including the civil code, criminal code, debt collection and bankruptcy law, international private law, as well as public and administrative law. The office also advises the other agencies of the Federal Administration on all legislative matters. It is responsible for the supervision of the commercial register, the register of births, marriages and deaths, the land registry, debt collection and bankruptcy and the enforcement of sentencing and criminal records. It provides building subsidies for the costs incurred by the cantons for construction work in connection with the implementation of criminal penalties and measures. Operational subsidies for youth welfare services premises also help to ensure the quality of correctional education work.

The Federal Office of Justice represents Switzerland at international level before the Strasbourg human rights bodies and in many other organisations and is the national agency dealing with international child abductions and adoptions. The Office collaborates with foreign authorities in the spheres of legal aid and extraditions.

They are also responsible for organising the protection of hundreds of foreign nationals who must be protected under international law, of local government officers and of federal buildings. They see to all the necessary steps involved in issuing passports or also issue entry bans.

Fedpol staff provide services to national and international partners, such as database operations to search for persons or property and to identify persons and traces. Finally, they also formulate the necessary agreements for international police cooperation, such as Switzerland’s incorporation into the Schengen area.

The Federal Office for Migration is responsible for all foreign nationals as well as asylum seekers and refugees. At the end of 2007, there were 1,570,965 people in possession of a residence permit or a permanent residence permit and 40,653 asylum seekers or provisionally admitted persons. This accounts for more than 1.6m people, half of whom are workers on which the economy depends.

In 2007 the Federal Office for Migration ruled on 45,000 naturalisation applications and over 9,500 asylum applications. It has issued some 177,100 work permits and over 638,800 visas.

The integration of foreign nationals is important; the basic rules for living together must be accepted. For the most part integration works well, although there is always room for improvement. In cooperation with several departments and offices, over 40 integration measures are being implemented, which were approved by the Federal Council in its 2007 report on integration measures. The most important integration measures relate to language skills, employment and education.
Other tasks are the implementation of mutual assistance applications by foreign prosecuting authorities and the promotion of cross-border cooperation in fighting crime.

**Federal Office of Metrology Metas**

Swiss goods and services are known for their high quality, precision and reliability. In order to reach this standard, our economy needs to be in a position to measure, test and assess the properties of its goods and services to the requisite degree of precision.

When assessing the precision of production, calculating electrical energy or keeping within the prescribed limits in the environment, the economy and society only function if the right measurements are made correctly.

The Federal Office of Metrology carries out Switzerland's reference measuring, ensures it is internationally recognised and passes on the measuring data with the required precision to research institutes, business and the general public. It is able to calibrate the most precise measuring instruments, thereby ensuring that Switzerland is able to measure and test to the requisite degree.

**Swiss Institute for Comparative Law SICL**

This independent institute advises international organisations, courts of law, law firms, authorities, companies and individuals in Switzerland and abroad on points of law on all national legal systems. It also provides Swiss law-makers with reference models and sources of inspiration for drawing up and revising laws and international treaties.

The institute library has 330,000 reference works in over 60 languages for academics everywhere. The SICL holds several events each year on topical subjects of comparative law and regularly publishes its own research work.

**Federal Institute of Intellectual Property IIP**

Is the coat of arms on Swiss army knives merely decorative or is it a brand name? Are cosmetics “Swiss made” if, despite being developed in Switzerland, they are produced abroad? And what is the Swiss cross doing on Chinese pans? In a word: How much Swiss input does a product have to have for it to be branded as a Swiss product? The Institute is concerned with the legal aspects of this very topical and hot subject. All these questions relate to nothing less than Switzerland’s positioning as a business location and the good reputation of Swiss designations of origin.

The Institute, commonly known as the patent office, protects not only (ground-breaking) inventions: for example, it also registers the design for a piece of furniture or the trade mark for a new drink and searching for existing inventions so that innovative companies have greater legal leverage if someone wants to copy their intellectual property.
Some two hundred years ago Bernese troops established a defensive position here against Napoleon’s army of 12,000 men that was advancing on the town. In the Battle of Grauholz, despite fierce resistance, the barely 900 strong contingent fell to the all-powerful enemy.

The French victory in 1798 brought down the Ancien Régime in Bern, marking the end of the old Confederation.

The ruins where Captain Andrea Schwarz trains her dog Orco to look for people buried under rubble, are clearly more recent and man made. They are part of the Sand military camp in Schönbühl, which is mainly used for the training and deployment of the armed forces’ pack animal, veterinary and dog handler units.

Before being recruited, Andrea Schwarz had to take an aptitude test as did Orco her dog.

As a military dog handler, Captain Schwarz has to complete a very time-consuming off-duty compulsory training and work programme with her dog each year so that she and her canine colleague are ready at any time to spring into action as a well-rehearsed team.

Orco is one of the 450 or so dogs that provide a service for the Swiss Armed Forces. Effectively a first response unit, he and his mistress are available in the event of disasters for searches by civilian and military rescue forces both in Switzerland and abroad.

Andrea Schwarz is one of the around 12,500 federal employees in the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport DDPS. Few people know about her work, but it benefits a great many people.
The Head of the DDPS has a very wide range of responsibilities and is supported in his daily work by the General Secretariat, which is a team of specialists from very varied fields that also plans for the middle and long term. The GS manages, coordinates and monitors the use of Department funds in the areas of personnel, finances, legal affairs, IT, and area planning and environment policy. It is also responsible for communication, the Library Am Guisanplatz, translation services, the DDPS Damage Compensation Centre and Information Security and Faculty Protection (ISFP).

For administrative purposes, the following are also affiliated to the GS:

- The Directorate for Security Policy (DSP), which is responsible for security policy strategy, coordinates the department’s international contacts, provides security policy support of armed forces operations in Switzerland and abroad, and armed forces planning and defence procurement, and deals with arms control and disarmament policy.
- The Strategic Intelligence Service (SIS), which procures and analyses – mainly for the national government – political, economic, military and techno-scientific intelligence from abroad on developments that either pose a risk or offer an opportunity for Switzerland.
- Parts of the Service for Analysis and Prevention (SAP). The SAP recognises in good time threats, arising for example from terrorism, espionage or violent extremism.
- The Staff of the Federal Council Security Committee (SFCSC). The Security Committee comprises three federal councilors (defence minister, justice minister and foreign minister) whose business is first examined by the Security Steering Group. Both committees are supported by the SFCSC by means of regular situation assessments and assistance in crisis management at federal level.

The General Secretariat also looks after the three world-famous Geneva Centres: the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and the Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces.
Civil protection

The P in DDPS stands for civil protection. Civil protection is an integrated system to provide crisis management, protection, rescue and assistance. It is designed to ensure coordination and cooperation between 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 in the event of disasters and emergencies.

Responsibility for civil protection lies mainly with the cantons. The federal government, in particular the Federal Office for Civil Protection (FOCP) takes care of the general planning and coordination of NBC (nuclear, biological and chemical threats) protection, early warning and alerting systems and other emergency procedures, training and protective infrastructure. The federal government is responsible particularly for issuing instructions in the event of increased radioactivity, emergencies relating to dams, epidemics and livestock epidemics, and armed conflict.

The National Emergency Operations Centre in Zurich is responsible for warning and alerting the authorities and emergency services. The Spiez Laboratory is Switzerland’s specialist institute for protection from nuclear, biological and chemical threats and hazards. Its services are often required by the UN and other international organisations.

Armasuisse

Armasuisse is the DDPS competence centre for procurement, technology, real estate and geodata. It ensures that the armed forces and civil protection are supplied with the systems, vehicles, equipment and properties that they require. Armasuisse is one of two federal government procurement centres. There is scarcely a household in Switzerland that does not have some armasuisse product such as the high quality products produced by the Federal Office of Topography (swisstopo) or the personal equipment of a Swiss Soldier.

Armasuisse is undergoing a restructuring phase and will work more closely with its client, the armed forces. Armasuisse will in future comprise the Corporate Management Staff, the Federal Office of Topography (swisstopo), the Central Services and the following areas of competence:

- Advanced command and control and reconnaissance systems (e.g. procurement of simulators)
- Land systems (e.g. procurement of armoured vehicles)
- Air systems (e.g. procurement of aircraft for the Confederation)
- Purchasing and cooperation
- Science and technology, and
- Real estate (manages in the region of 26000 properties and 26000 hectares of land belonging to the DDPS)

As Armasuisse is responsible for arms and equipment during their entire life cycle, it is also responsible for their liquidation.

Sport

The S in DDPS stands for Sport. The Federal Office of Sport (FOSPO) promotes sport and physical activity for the whole population. Its activities focus on the positive effects of sport and physical activity: health, education, performance and society. The FOSPO devises and develops national sports policy and implements the resulting tasks. The Swiss Federal Institute of Sports in Magglingen is responsible for training, and research and development. It also runs the national sports promotion programme Youth + Sport in which around 800'000 young sportspeople in 60 different disciplines take part each year.

In Magglingen, above Biel, and in Tenero near Locarno, the FOSPO runs state-of-the-art education, training and course centres for use by universities, associations, clubs and schools.
What have we got here then?

According to the customs declaration this container is laden with exactly ten million cigarettes produced and packaged in Dagmersellen bound for export to the Middle East. The manufacturer has registered the consignment at the Klein hünigen customs office and is expecting clearance for export as usual.

Customs officer Denise Ulmann at the Basel Rhine port container terminal decides to take a closer look. When inspecting merchandise she checks that all the details regarding the product, such as value, weight, quantity and many others are correct. If so, she releases the consignment and writes up her report.

Of course Denise Ulmann doesn’t unload the whole container or open up each box; she has no grounds to suspect that there is anything amiss. As a rule she and her colleagues have to limit themselves to spot checks.

Given Switzerland’s huge volume of foreign trade it isn’t possible to do anything else: Each year our country exports and imports goods to the value of around CHF 200 billion. Exports channelled along the Rhine alone amount to six and a half million tonnes a year. If Denise Ulmann wanted to inspect each and every gram that’s roughly how much a cigarette weighs she might as well give up.

Denise Ulmann is one of the around 9200 employees at the Federal Department of Finance FDF.
Few people know about her work, but it benefits a great many people.
On a Tuesday evening in the Bernerhof, all the lights are burning and the offices are a hive of activity. The departments are submitting their final comments on the items of business concerning the FDF for the next morning’s Federal Council meeting. In the General Secretariat, the finishing touches are being made to the proposals.

The GS plans the items of business and supports Federal Councillor Hans-Rudolf Merz. The general public is informed through the department’s communications. Improvisation would be out of place here, not least due to the different language versions: all information regarding Federal Council affairs is provided simultaneously in German, French and Italian. The Federal Strategy Unit for Information Technology is also affiliated to the GS. It draws up the principles for the further development of information technology in the federal administration and coordinates cooperation between the federal government, the cantons and the communes in the field of e-Government.

The FFA is the custodian of the federal coffers. The old rule “not to spend more than you earn” also applies here. In 2001, voters instructed the Federal Council and parliament not to run up any further debt. The debt brake therefore requires spending not to increase more quickly than revenue. The FFA has to comply with this requirement when it draws up the budget for the coming year. The FFA also draws up a financial plan for the three following years to give political actors sufficient time to make the appropriate changes. The financial plan lists all the agreed and envisaged expenditures. This allows sufficient time to decide whether projects need to be halted or if new sources of revenue need to be sought.

Through its transparent accounts, the FFA ensures that parliament and the people can see how their tax money is being spent and whether their decisions are being implemented. In addition, the FFA also oversees the legal framework of the Swiss financial centre and represents the country’s interests with regard to international financial and monetary issues.

The FTA has prepared a complete revision of the VAT Act that is now well-advanced. Why does the server at the fast-food counter ask you if you would like your hamburger to eat in or take away? It’s not just to know whether or not to put the food in a bag. The tax on your hamburger to go is lower than if you eat it in the restaurant – 2.4% instead of 7.6%. That does seem a bit complicated, but there are other issues and problems, too, which is why the FTA has prepared a complete revision of the VAT Act that is now being debated in parliament. And this is only one of its many tasks. Overall, it is the FTA that is responsible for collecting the bulk of federal revenues.

Switzerland generates every second franc abroad. It can only do this if the international movements of goods and people flow smoothly. The FCA therefore tries to keep the time it takes to cross the border to a minimum. At the same time it ensures that the applicable legal requirements are met. In addition it levies a number of consumption taxes such as VAT, tax on mineral oil or tobacco. The FCA is also responsible for checking precious metals, issuing motorway vignettes, collecting the mileage-related heavy vehicle charge and other tasks.

The Border Guard is the uniformed and armed section of the FCA and is the largest national civilian security organisation. Its duties include conducting searches for people, vehicles and other objects, fighting drug smuggling and document forgery, identity checks and traffic police duties, as well as customs services and fighting smuggling in general.
Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunication BIT

There is currently an intensive exchange of personal data from residents’ registers between the communes, the cantons and the Confederation. Around 100 different applications used to manage residents’ data are linked to the Sedex (secure data exchange) data exchange platform in order to prepare for the 2010 census, which will primarily be based on registry and administrative data. Sedex and numerous other applications operate using digital certificates. So far the FOITT has issued over 50,000 such certificates that are being used productively by the cantons and the federal administration. As a recognised provider of digital certificates, the FOITT is making a significant contribution to IT security and is a pioneer in the use of legally recognised digital signatures in public administration in Switzerland.

Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics FOBL

Why are most of the offices in the Federal Administration filled with the same light grey furniture? It is because federal employees are not allowed to simply purchase their desks and chairs from any furniture manufacturer that takes their fancy. Offices would have more of a personal touch, but this would be costly. Standardised items purchased in bulk are less expensive than individual purchases. Large numbers of quotes have to be requested – a thousand desks, ten pallets of ballpoint pens, tonnes of printer paper – and the contract is awarded to the best value bid. This is one of the responsibilities of the FOBL, which also maintains and manages the federal government’s properties.

Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority Finma

Switzerland has one of the world’s leading financial markets. The financial sector is therefore extremely important for the country’s economy. In view of the dynamic developments in the financial markets and the ever increasing complexity of financial market supervision there was a need to improve the institutional structure of the existing supervisory authorities. Since the beginning of 2009, supervision of the core areas of the financial sector (banks, insurance companies, stock exchange etc.) is undertaken by a single body, the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority Finma. It was created through the merger of the Swiss Federal Banking Commission (SFBC), the Federal Office of Private Insurance (FOPI) and the Anti-Money Laundering Control Authority.

Swiss Federal Audit Office SFAO

As the Confederation’s supreme audit institution, the SFAO has the right to request information from all federal employees about their work. It endeavours to identify deficiencies and weaknesses from a critical distance. It achieves improvements in the performance of federal activities by convincing staff of its expert recommendations. The SFAO relies on dialogue because its recommendations are more likely to be accepted.

Swiss Alcohol Board SAB

The SAB regulates the market for alcohol by means of taxes, controls and restrictions on trading and advertising. Alcosuisse, the SAB’s profit centre is responsible for trade in ethanol (high grade alcohol).

As part of the total revision of the Alcohol Act, the questions of a liberalisation of the ethanol market by lifting the federal monopoly and the possible privatisation of Alcosuisse will be examined. The general conditions for the domestic production of spirits will also be established along with an adjustment of proven provisions on prevention.

Federal Pension Fund Publica

The Publica Act entered into force on 1 July 2008. That completed the switch from a defined benefit plan to a contributory plan and the organisation’s restructuring as a collective institution. With a total of 9 different pension schemes Publica has entered a new era.

Pension scheme members will also have to contribute their share to future financial stability. The new regulations require that institution has sufficient funds to meet its promised payments, which as a result of the change of structure could lead to significantly higher contribution payments for older pension scheme members in the coming years.
It’s sunny enough...

...even if the sky appears slightly overcast. The sun shines 40,000 billion kilowatt hours a year on Switzerland, which amounts to 220 times more energy than we currently use.

We need to make far better use of this immense free extraterrestrial power station. That is precisely the thought of Alain Dietrich from the Innovation Promotion Agency CTI, which is part of the Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology OPET.

Accompanied by two executives from Oerlikon Solar, Jürg Steinmann (right) and Michael Schmidt, Mr. Dietrich examines the photovoltaic installation on the roof of the company in Trübbach.

Do the newly developed thin-film silicon solar modules meet expectations? Are they as efficient as predicted in the project description? Will they reduce power production costs as expected? Is further federal funding justified to develop these modules for the market?

As project manager in the field of engineering technology at the CTI, Alain Dietrich is interested in helping companies rapidly convert new knowledge from research into products. This is why the CTI supports cooperation between universities and business.

The 26 gigawatt hours of solar power a year currently produced cover only around 0.03% of the country’s electricity consumption. However, with its 400 square kilometres of roof area, Switzerland could produce roughly a third of its heating and electricity requirements through solar energy!

Alain Dietrich is one of the around 2200 federal employees at the Federal Department of Economic Affairs FDEA.

Few people know about his work, but it benefits a great many people.
Federal Department of Economic Affairs FDEA

General Secretariat

The General Secretariat is the staff and coordination office of the Department and supports and advises the head of Department in her daily work. It briefly also involves planning, coordinating and monitoring the department’s activities and it is responsible for overseeing the results and assessing the effects of its decisions. The General Secretariat provides human resources, finances and logistics, accounting and translation services for the whole department, as well as IT services.

The Federal Consumer Affairs Bureau and the Central Office for Civilian Service are also affiliated to the General Secretariat. Swiss consumers have access to over 22 million different products and services. The Federal Consumer Affairs Bureau takes account of the interests of consumers and of the economy as a whole. In order to publicise consumer concerns, it also promotes access to objective information.

Last year, almost two thousand Swiss men were approved for civilian service. These men were able to demonstrate credibility that they would be unable to perform military service for reasons of conscience. The Central Office for Civilian Service makes these decisions at its seven regional centres throughout the country. It is also responsible for the recognition of the institutions in which the service is to be performed and provides advice to both the individuals and the institutions concerned.

State Secretariat for Economic Affairs Seco

Seco is the Swiss Confederation’s central office for all core issues of economic policy. Its stated aim is to promote sustainable economic growth by creating an appropriate regulatory and economic framework.

Employers and employees should be able to benefit from growth-oriented policies, the removal of barriers to trade, and the reduction of Switzerland’s relatively high prices. On the domestic front, Seco acts as an interface between business, social partners and government. It supports the regionally and structurally balanced development of the economy and ensures the protection of employees. Through its labour market policy it contributes to the prevention and tackling of unemployment and consequently to upholding social peace. SECO also helps to ensure access to all markets for Swiss goods and services and investment. In terms of foreign economic policy, it is active in the formulation of efficient, fair and transparent rules for the world economy. Switzerland’s relations to the European Union and to the European Free Trade Association are coordinated by the Integration Office, a joint office of the FDFA and the FDEA.

Seco also contributes to the sustainable development and integration of countries from the South and East into the world economy and to the reduction of social and economic disparities in the enlarged EU.

The Swiss Accreditation Service SAS which is now affiliated to Seco is responsible for the accreditation of public and private inspection and conformity assessment bodies in accordance with internationally recognised standards.

Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology OPET

Education, research and innovation are essential for the economic, societal and social development of our country. The OPET deals with all three areas: It is the federal government’s competence centre for vocational and professional education and training, Universities of Applied Sciences and innovation promotion. In this way, the OPET plays its part by training well qualified workers and making Switzerland an attractive location in which to do business. Together with the cantons and the professional associations, the OPET aims to secure a high-level of vocational training. It coordinates the universities of applied sciences, which not only train future managers, but are also involved in applied research and development. The Innovation Promotion Agency CTI acts as a bridge between science and society. It supports research projects, the transfer of knowledge and technology between universities and businesses and the recruitment of people with innovative ideas for new companies.

Federal Office for Agriculture FOAG

Switzerland has 1065,118 hectares of farmland, 1,560,000 head of cattle in its pastures and 188,024 people employed in the agricultural sector. Each year, the federal government provides agriculture with financial support of around CHF 3.4 billion. 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 towards meeting the food needs of the population and maintaining the basic necessities of life as well as towards the settlement of rural areas. It must also seek a socially acceptable balance 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.
A tourist carrying 200 kilos of ape meat is stopped at the airport and another tries to illegally import souvenirs made of tortoise shell. Bluetongue has spread to Switzerland and has triggered the need for a vaccination campaign for cattle, sheep and goats. Animal rights activists are calling for stricter laws governing livestock farming while farmers are opposed. The tabloid press calls for “effective measures against fighting dogs” – many dog owners complain that they are being harassed by “dog haters” even though they behave properly.

All these situations have one thing in common: they are all difficult issues covered by the FVO: animal health, animal protection, food safety, species protection checks at border points and international cooperation in all these areas are dealt with by FVO employees on a daily basis. Many of these are emotive issues and that is how it should be as a federal office is there for people with thoughts and feelings.

Switzerland buys virtually 100 per cent of its raw materials, 80 per cent of its energy, around one third of all its food, and a large proportion of essential therapeutic products from abroad. In cooperation with the private sector, FONES ensures that people in Switzerland have supplies of vital commodities in a crisis situation.

Supplies of food, energy supplies and therapeutic drugs are guaranteed by protecting imports, setting up compulsory reserves and making full use of domestic production. In addition, it is FONES’ task to ensure the availability of transport capacities, sensitive industrial products and information technology infrastructure. It also takes measures to ensure the equitable distribution of scarce commodities.

At Switzerland’s latitude it is impossible to survive without accommodation. Housing is therefore a basic need. However, an apartment is also a capital asset. Each year around CHF 24 billion is invested in housing construction. Living costs are the greatest items of expenditure for households. Tenants pay some CHF 25 billion a year in rent and around CHF 18 billion is paid by house owners to creditors by way of 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 ageing population, changing family and household structures and new lifestyles and forms of work also have an impact on housing. The FHO also seeks to reconcile the interests of landlords and tenants in the area of tenancy law.

People used to worry about the cost of a cup of coffee. Now it tends to be doctors’ or hospital bills, gas and water rates, or rubbish disposal and postal charges. Price supervision is aimed at protecting consumers from excessive pricing. It monitors price trends and blocks or eliminates improper price increases that have not been determined under free market conditions.

It is often the case that medicines are more expensive in Switzerland than abroad, that businesses put pressure on their suppliers and that companies merge. Such business transactions can have an adverse effect on consumers and other companies. ComCo monitors these transactions, prohibits illegal cartels and intervenes in cases where free competition is restricted. Its stated aim is to ensure unrestricted market access for businesses in Switzerland and open borders with foreign countries.

The SFIVET is the federal government’s competence centre for basic and continuing training of VET/PET professionals and conducts research and evaluations in a wide range of fields related to professional training.

Every year at the SFIVET’s three locations: Lausanne, Lugano and Zollikofen, as well as in Zurich, a total of 600 VET/PET professionals obtain a diploma or a certificate, and 6000 expert examiners are trained. Around 40 new education programs are monitored and more than 20 research projects are carried out every year.
Exactly 1140 litres per second

That is the volume of water that flows in the Riale di Pinasca on this nice day in June, shortly before it flows into the Verzasca; that’s around half the average flow rate.

As is often the case, an average does not necessarily tell you very much. At times, this stream slows down to barely a trickle; a violent storm however can turn it into a raging torrent.

A seven hundredfold variation in flow is not uncommon for a mountain stream. That is precisely why the work of engineer Andrea Crose from the Federal Office for the Environment’s Hydrology Division is so important.

Six times a year, he measures the Riale’s water level and flow rate near Lavertezzo and calibrates the automatic hydrological station. This continually transmits the readings to a central database, which also gathers and analyses data from the 260 or so other measuring stations in Switzerland.

Having all this data makes it possible to respond rapidly in extreme situations and plan the construction of protective barriers in good time. Here in Switzerland, the water levels of rivers and lakes can often change significantly and extremely quickly depending on the weather and the time of year.

Due to the fact that rain fronts can be blocked by the Alps for days on end, Switzerland has twice as much precipitation as the rest of Europe, amounting to an average of 1429 litres per square metre and year.

The water level readings generated by the nationwide measuring network form the basis of flow forecasts, which can be critical in extending the time available to implement protection measures in the event of flooding.
Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications

**General Secretariat**

Hans Worder

Staff: 75

Expenditure: 60'349'600.–

The office directors meet at the General Secretariat (GS) in Bern several times a year as it is not unusual for several offices to have a common interest in ongoing business. The meeting provides an opportunity to discuss these issues at the highest level.

The GS serves as the staff office for the Head of Department. It plans and coordinates all departmental activities. In addition, it also exercises the role of owner with regard to Swiss Post, SBB, Swisscom and Skyguide and supervises the implementation of the strategic aims set out by the Federal Council.

The Independent Complaints Authority for Radio and Television, the Public Transport Accident Investigation Office, the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau, and the postal services regulation authority (PostReg) are all affiliated to DETEC.

**Federal Office of Transport (FOT)**

Max Friedli

Staff: 248

Expenditure: 6'432'000.–

In a series of popular votes the Swiss population has repeatedly approved measures to transfer transalpine heavy goods traffic from road to rail. Switzerland completed the first stage of this process with the opening in mid-June 2007 of the Lötschberg base tunnel, one part of the New Rail Link through the Alps (NRLA). The tunnel is now fully operational and almost running at capacity. The NRLA, which is the cornerstone of traffic transfer policy, also consists of the Gotthard and Ceneri base tunnels, which are still under construction.

The huge NRLA project is coordinated by the Federal Office of Transport. It carries out the tasks determined by the Federal Council and parliament, monitors compliance in terms of cost and deadlines and issues the necessary authorisations.

The FOT is effectively the office for public transport. Switzerland has a comprehensive and reliable transport network ranging from intercity trains to trams, buses, cable cars and paddle steamers. The FOT makes sure that the network continues to be modernised and is operated safely.

Plans to expand the network are in preparation. The new line across Zurich is already under construction, and preparations for the transboundary urban rail system in Geneva and the new Stabio-Arcisate railway line are well advanced. Journey times between Geneva and St. Gallen should be reduced by half an hour by 2030. Public transport timetables will be further improved with additional services. Targeted line extensions and more railway hubs will result in even better connections for many public transport users.

**Federal Office of Civil Aviation (FOCA)**

Matthias Suhr

Staff: 227

Expenditure: 107'024'646.–

“Safety first” is the FOCA’s overriding principle. The FOCA uses a system of certificates and inspections to guarantee the implementation of high-level safety standards measured against a European cross-section. A Safety Management System, designed to recognise and minimise risks, serves as the basis for the supervisory activities.

In order to further improve air safety, Switzerland operates a system of non-punitive reporting. This principle allows pilots, air traffic controllers, mechanics and ground crews to report errors and accidents without being prosecuted by the FOCA. This approach places greater emphasis on learning from incidents that compromise safety than on penalising those at fault. The FOCA is performing pioneering work with its system of non-punitive reporting: only a few countries in Europe operate this type of system.

**Swiss Federal Office of Energy (SFOE)**

Walter Steinmann

Staff: 227

Expenditure: 14'041'700.–

The Federal Council’s energy policy is based on the following four pillars: improvement of energy efficiency, promotion of renewable energy sources, the replacement of existing large-scale power stations as well as increased international cooperation. The SFOE has the task of substantiating these principles and developing the conditions that will still guarantee sufficient safe and environmentally friendly energy supplies in the future.

The Energy Perspectives 2035 serve as the basis for the SFOE’s energy policy. The report shows that the supply of energy, heating fuels and vehicle fuels can only be secured in the long term with new, more effective regulations, procedures and promotion programmes. The SFOE has specified part of these new measures in its plans of action. Its aim is to significantly reduce energy consumption in Switzerland by 2020, to improve the energy efficiency of appliances and engines and to significantly increase the share of renewable energies.

The Swiss Federal Nuclear Safety Inspectorate (ENSI) is the federal regulatory authority in charge of nuclear safety and the safety of Switzerland’s nuclear power plants. The ENSI took up its duties as the successor organisation to the Federal Nuclear Safety Inspectorate (HSK) in 2009. Its duties remain the same, however, the HSK was part of the Federal Office of Energy, and the new ENSI is an independent organisation.
The following problems: which national road sections need to be extended? Which road sections need to be resurfaced? Which roads need to be widened? What is the most effective way of using available funds? The Federal Roads Office (FEDRO) is mandated by the Federal Council and parliament to solve these problems. It is important to take into consideration the people and cars on the road. This is why, for example, FEDRO sets the requirements that drivers of 40-tonne trucks need to fulfil to ensure they transport their cargo safely and in an environmentally friendly way. FEDRO also modifies technical requirements affecting car design (e.g. bumper height/shape) to reduce the risk of injury to pedestrians or cyclists.

The increasing volume of traffic on the roads also has to be guided intelligently. FEDRO operates a traffic management system, which is run from a control centre in Emmen. The system allows the authorities to modify the flow of traffic on the national road network and ensure efficient and sustainable use of the limited road network.

FEDRO ensures the flow of traffic on Swiss roads. FEDRO is actively involved in the federal action programme to improve road safety, Via sicura. The FOEN helps to ensure that the cantons, communes and residents are prepared for these things – be it in the shape of forests to protect roads and housing, or maps indicating the areas where natural hazards are most likely to occur.

Health also has a lot to do with our environment: it is easier to breathe when there is no fine particle dust or ozone in the air. People who are not bothered by noise have a better quality of life. Varied landscapes are not only beautiful, they are also important for tourism. The FOEN therefore also contributes to a healthy economy because it helps ensure the long-term use of landscapes, water, soil, air and forests.

In Switzerland, a square metre of land is built on every second. On the one hand this is due to the fact that people are becoming increasingly mobile, which creates the need for more space to build roads and railway lines. On the other, there is an increasing demand for housing, not least due to the annual increase in population, which amounts to the size of a medium-sized town. This leads to an increased loss of recreational space. The Federal Constitution however stipulates that land should be used appropriately and economically.

ARE weighs up these many demands on scarce land resources. The “Swiss spatial plan” provides a reference for spatial planning. Together with the revised Spatial Planning Act, it defines the framework of Switzerland’s future spatial and traffic development.

In addition to allocating frequencies for radio and television stations, OFCOM also sees that the individual channels do not infringe the conditions of their licence. From 2008, private local radio and television companies will receive a greater share of licence fee revenues. OFCOM ensures that these revenues are distributed fairly between the regions.

The Federal Office for the Environment,FOEN, is responsible for environmental protection and sustainable development. FOEN’s goals are to improve the quality of the environment, protect human health and prevent pollution. FOEN is also responsible for waste management, nature conservation and the protection of biodiversity.

In addition to its role in environmental protection, FOEN is also responsible for the Federal Roads Office (FEDRO) and the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE). FEDRO is responsible for the flow of traffic on Swiss roads, while ARE is responsible for the planning and development of the country’s infrastructure.


Federal Office of Communications, OFCOM, www.bakom.admin.ch

Director: Martin Dumermuth 205 Revenue: 45 080 100.– Expenditure: 91 018 500.–

Staff: 61 Revenue: 20 100.– Expenditure: 17 083 800.–

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The Federal Constitution declares sustainable development – finding a balance between environmental, economic and social interests – to be a national objective. ARE coordinates these activities and collaborates closely with the cantons and communities. Today, a third of the Swiss population lives in a commune that is involved in a sustainability process.

In addition, ARE is also involved in shaping transport policy, primarily focusing on projects in urban areas particularly affected by traffic and urban sprawl.
The Federal Courts or

The Judiciary
For most people a paper chase is a children’s game. For the justice authorities, it involves the tedious and often long-winded work of following each and every lead in an effort to convict money launderers. Money laundering is the illegal channelling of money acquired from drug trafficking, for example, into the legal economic cycle so as to cover up its origin.

People involved in money laundering often invest money in businesses where the turnover is not transparent, for example, in boutiques, brothels, real estate agencies, second-hand shops, restaurants and travel agencies. In a second step, they move the alleged profits around in a series of transactions until it becomes virtually impossible to retrace the money’s origins.

The task of following this paper trail of invoices, receipts, transfers and bank records until a complete chain of evidence of criminal scheming can be produced is extremely laborious, but not futile, as the case described on the following page shows.
The Federal Courts

The Third Power

The Federal Supreme Court as the highest court in Switzerland and the federal courts of first instance embody, at the federal level, the judiciary, one of the three state powers, the others being parliament, the legislature, and the Federal Council, the executive. Through their legal decisions, these courts contribute to the development of the law and to its adaptation to changing circumstances. The decisions of the Federal Supreme Court and the final rulings of the Federal Criminal and Administrative Courts may be referred to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

The Federal Supreme Court must provide legal redress, ensure the uniform application of federal law, and develop the law in keeping with changes in the ways people live their lives. And it has jurisdiction in Switzerland as the court of final instance in almost every legal field:

Public law
The Federal Supreme Court hears appeals against cantonal decisions in matters of public law and legislation as well as violations of political rights (the right to vote, popular elections and votes). The two public law divisions rule on cases in these areas.

Civil cases
The Federal Supreme Court hears appeals against cantonal court judgements in civil matters (private law, contract law, commercial law, intellectual property, etc.). In disputes relating to property, the value of the claim must amount to at least CHF 30,000, or to CHF 15,000 in employment and tenancy cases. The two civil law divisions rule on disputes in these legal fields.

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

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

Subsidiary constitutional appeal
If the foregoing appeals are not admissible, action can be taken against violations of constitutional rights by means of a subsidiary constitutional appeal.
From the offence to final verdict

In July 2002, Switzerland’s then ambassador to Luxembourg was arrested on suspicion of having accepted under dubious circumstances a total of 2.4 million francs from a drug ring and then having transferred it, some of it even through his own accounts. The Office of the Attorney General and the Federal Criminal Police launched a criminal investigation.

As the initial suspicion was confirmed, the Office of the Attorney General passed the files on to the Office of the Federal Examining Magistrates for a preliminary investigation, which then examined the matter in greater detail and subsequently returned the files along with its report.

As the justified grounds for suspicion against the accused were corroborated, the Office of the Attorney General filed charges with the Federal Criminal Court. After the indictment had been received, the presiding judge of the criminal chamber set a deadline for the defendant and the injured party for the submission of evidence. He subsequently decided on the evidence to be submitted and set the date and time of the main trial.

The hearings began on 9 May 2005 at the seat of the Federal Criminal Court in Bellinzona. Due to the severity of the possible sentence, the court sat as a panel of three judges advised by a court clerk.

On 2 June 2005, based on the evidence and the findings of the trial, the court found the defendant guilty of aggravated money laundering, forgery of documents, embezzlement and reduction of assets to the prejudice of creditors. He was acquitted on the count of participation in a criminal organisation.

The convicted offender filed an appeal against the verdict with the Federal Supreme Court. It upheld the verdict on all counts except that of forgery of documents.

The Federal Criminal Court reached a new verdict on the points overruled on 4 April 2006. As a renewed appeal by the defendant against that decision was rejected, the verdict of the Federal Criminal Court became final.
The Federal Administrative Court is the latest of the federal courts. It began its duties in 2007 and has its seat in Bern. In 2012, it is planned to move the court to a permanent location in St. Gallen.

The main task of the Federal Administrative Court is to sit in judgement on public law disputes that fall within the jurisdiction of the Federal Administration. These primarily involve appeals against decisions taken by federal or, in certain exceptional cases, cantonal courts. However, the Federal Administrative Court is also a court of first instance for actions based on federal administrative law.

In certain cases, decisions of the Federal Administrative Court may be appealed to the Federal Supreme Court. In more than half of its cases, however, it issues the final judgement as the court of last instance or of sole instance.

Organisation
The Federal Administrative Court employs 74 judges and a further 280 members of staff.

The court is organised in five divisions, with each having two chambers, and a General Secretariat.

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

- The First Division is responsible for appeal proceedings in areas including the environment, transport, energy and taxes.
- The Second Division focuses on proceedings relating to education, competition and the economy.
- The Third Division deals mainly with proceedings in the field of immigration, social security and health.
- The Fourth and Fifth Divisions operate exclusively in the field of asylum law, in particular in relation to questions of refugee status and deportation orders.

In most of these fields, the judgements of the Federal Administrative Court can be appealed to the Federal Supreme Court; in a few areas, and in particular in relation to asylum matters, the decisions of the Federal Administrative Court are final.

The Federal Criminal Court is the general criminal court of the Confederation, and has its seat in Bellinzona. It sits in judgement as a preliminary instance of the Federal Supreme Court.

It is independent in its activities but is subject to the administrative supervision of the Federal Supreme Court and the supervisory control of the Federal Assembly, which appoints the judges of the Federal Criminal Court, of whom there are currently fifteen. They have a basic term of office of six years. Around 35 members of staff assist them in their work.

In accordance with its duties, the Court is organised into one criminal chamber and two appeals chambers.

Criminal Chamber
The Criminal Chamber is the court of first instance for offences that are subject to federal jurisdiction: felonies and misdemeanours against federal interests, explosives offences and cases of white-collar crime, serious organised crime offences 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.

First and Second Appeals Chambers
The First Appeals Chamber hears appeals against official acts and/omissions by the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland or the Federal Examining Magistrates. In addition, it rules on coercive measures in federal criminal proceedings and on extensions of periods on remand, and deals with conflicts of jurisdiction between cantonal prosecution authorities or between the prosecution authorities of the Confederation and those in the cantons. The President of the First Appeals Chamber is responsible for approving telephone surveillance operations and covert investigations.

The Second Appeals Chamber deals with matters relating to international mutual assistance in criminal matters, i.e. appeals relating to the extradition of persons who face prosecution or who have been convicted, mutual assistance in foreign criminal proceedings as well as execution of penalties based on foreign convictions.

Decisions of the First and Second Appeals Chambers may be challenged in the Federal Supreme Court within 30 days. The decisions of all three chambers are normally published on the Court’s website.
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