Cover
For years, the Federal Palace has adorned the cover of this brochure. Now we would like to take a somewhat different look at Switzerland. For example, at the strikingly beautiful Tschingelsee in the Berner Oberland, one of the country’s 283 protected wetland areas. Wetlands are protected in Switzerland as the result of a decision by parliament. Politics is not abstract: it deals with issues which affect us directly in all kinds of areas.
Dear Reader

In October a new parliament will be elected: elections to the National Council will be held and the majority of cantons will also select their members to the Council of States. In many countries, parliamentary elections present the only opportunity for the citizens to have a say in politics. Things are very different here. Switzerland is the world champion in holding referendums. Over 30 per cent of all referendums held globally since the 18th century have been held in Switzerland.

In no other country in the world is politics so intensively debated as it is here. Three to four times a year we vote on issues that have a direct impact on our lives; issues such as health policy, education, Switzerland’s relations with other countries or the future of energy. Nothing is taboo. We have even voted on abolishing the armed forces and whether or not Switzerland needs new fighter jets.

The Swiss political system does not give us an easy ride – it is intensive, demanding and requires endurance. Compromise is always necessary. All the regions, cultures, majorities and minorities should be able to identify with political decisions. Involving everyone in this way is challenging and takes time. But it is also what brings politics to life and usually enables us to get the best outcome.

The issues involved are often complicated and require explanation. This is where this brief guide to the Swiss Confederation can help. It explains the workings of the state, the parliamentary system, the government and the administration. We update the text and images in the brochure each year, and so depict a fascinating model of democracy.

I hope you enjoy reading this brochure!

Federal Chancellor Corina Casanova
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…as well as the seven other political parties in parliament 20

www.admin.ch there is a wealth of information about current federal policy, the Federal Council and Federal Administration.

www.ch.ch provides a full range of information and services from the Confederation, cantons and communes.
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INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT SIMONETTA SOMMARUGA

President Simonetta Sommaruga in discussion with eight young people:

Nina Ackermann, 1995, high school student from Lenzburg (AG)
Joshua Auf der Maur, 1996, high school student from Wallbach (AG)
Arianna Lanfranchi, 1997, high school student from Haldenstein (GR)
Simon Lengacher, 1993, student from Chur (GR)
Sandra Siegenthaler, 1993, commercial employee/student from Herzogenbuchsee (BE)
Andri Silberschmidt, 1994, bank employee/student from Ottikon (ZH)
Fiona Stiefel, 1989, primary school teacher from Dietikon (ZH)
Barbara Vock, 1990, commercial employee/student from Bözen (AG)

Fiona Stiefel: Madam President, why did you decide to go into politics?
At high school I was always an avid newspaper reader. I used to go straight to the politics section; the sports pages didn’t really interest me. Nowadays I’m also interested in the sports results, especially if Federer and Wawrinka have won (they all laugh). What really got me actively involved as a young woman was my voluntary work at a women’s refuge. I worked the night shift there for almost five years and saw women and children going through extremely difficult situations. I realised that those situations were also a societal problem. So my drive for going into politics came from a desire for justice and to make things happen.

Barbara Vock: As a communal councillor I’m curious to understand how information flows in the Federal Council. With so many items of business to deal with at any one cabinet meeting, are decisions ever taken without actually knowing the full details?
No, because thanks to our clever system we have time to prepare our positions on any controversial items. We receive the agenda for the Federal Council meeting almost a week in advance. That way we can see before the meeting what objections have been raised to the various proposals, and form an opinion. But all of us in the Federal Council are open to persuasion if sound arguments are presented. We are frequently able to win over a majority for our own proposals. The discussions can sometimes be forthright, but always remain businesslike. The process of wrestling for a solution is all-important and takes place across party lines.

Arianna Lanfranchi: As well as holding the office of president this year, you also have the difficult task in your role as justice minister of implementing the mass immigration initiative. How do you manage to do this when the initiative is contrary to your own views?
Both the Federal Council and parliament recommended that the initiative be rejected. But ultimately it is the voters’ say that counts. The Federal Council’s task now is to prepare a draft law for parliament, which implements the will of the people, and at the same time negotiate with the EU. We know that it is not an easy task. We mustn’t forget that good relations with our neighbours, and with the EU as a whole, are extremely important.
Political culture means that a majority respects the minority.

Andri Silberschmidt: The public voted in favour of the mass immigration initiative despite the fact that the Federal Council and the business community warned against doing so. That would seem to show a lack of trust in politics and business. What do you see as the cause?

You raise an important point. As far as business is concerned, the excesses of recent years – in the form of exorbitant salaries and bonus payments, for example – alienated people. In terms of politics, I think it’s slightly different. I do occasionally hear comments about the people in Bern being far removed from people’s everyday concerns. But I don’t think that’s a true reflection of our direct democracy. In Bern the public get to see members of the government walking around town. In the run up to popular votes the Federal Council travels around the country dropping into village pubs to give talks, answer questions and pose for selfies (they all laugh). What I mean by that is that we live in a system in which the public can play a direct part, have its say on specific issues four times a year and vote in elections every four years. That requires a certain proximity between voters and their political representatives. The fact that the public vote sometimes goes against what the Federal Council would like to see is nothing new. We have to be careful not to conjure up a divide where none exists.

Barbara Vock: After our council meetings we often go for a drink. It’s important for team building. What does the Federal Council do?

We usually have lunch together. There we address each other by our first names. During the meetings though we address each other more formally to underline the fact that we are acting, and occasionally arguing, in our respective roles and not on a personal level.

Sandra Siegenthaler: I’ve been able to vote for three years now. Sometimes though I just don’t know what the right decision is because I’m not familiar enough with the subject. I read the explanatory pamphlet, but it’s still difficult to decide what’s best. Our system is very demanding. You need to get to grips with the subject matter. I’m glad to hear that you read the pamphlet. A further source of help could be the parties. You might not necessarily be a member, but maybe you have certain sympathies. The media also play a key role in opinion-forming. That’s why a free and varied media is so important. Voters are better able to form their own opinion if differing views are represented and discussed.
Simon Lengacher: My problem is usually that there’s too much information. It can leave you overwhelmed. What can the Federal Council do to make sure that the voting proposals aren’t overly complex?

That’s a good question, but the answer is equally complex (they all laugh). That complexity is in part a reflection of our everyday lives. Take the deportation initiative, for example. The initiative contains provisions which directly contravene the European Convention on Human Rights. That’s an agreement that Switzerland has signed along with many other states. The Federal Constitution states that we must respect human rights, yet at the same time, since the deportation initiative was adopted, we have had a constitutional article in place which conflicts with that. It is complex, and there’s no getting around that. The question is how we deal with it. I believe political culture is an important aspect in that regard.

Simon Lengacher: What do you mean by that?

Political culture means that a majority respects the minority. We have a tradition in Switzerland of having consideration for one another and not simply saying: I won, I don’t care about anything else. That means that all sides have to be willing to compromise. Members of parliament have to reach out to one another, even if it’s difficult. The same is also true for the Federal Council. When I tell my foreign colleagues that our government is a coalition of five different political parties, they shake their heads in amazement (all laugh) and ask how we cope. To which I reply, that’s our political culture. That’s how we are able to resolve even complex problems.

Nina Ackermann: Madam President, how do you cope with all the dossiers that land on your desk each day? I can’t imagine how you manage to keep track of everything, and how you can tell what’s important and what’s not.

My department handles around 12000 items of business each year, so I do indeed have to set priorities. Some work is generated by popular votes, and some comes from parliament. In such cases there are clearly defined procedures and deadlines. Then there are other things that I can decide myself. When I was elected federal councillor four years ago, I received numerous letters from ‘contract children’. They asked me to finally recognise the wrong that was done to many of them. At a commemoration event I apologised on behalf of the government. We set up a round table for discussions and a fund for immediate assistance. Nevertheless, much remains to be done to truly come to terms with this dark chapter in Switzerland’s history.
The office I hold requires not only an understanding of the law, but also the ability to put oneself in the others’ situation and understand their needs.

Joshua Auf der Maur: You’re a trained pianist. How does your artistic side cope with the strict rules that have to be respected in the Federal Council?

Artistic work also follows strict rules (they all laugh). Yes, when I was elected, people said, ‘a pianist as justice minister – how is that going to turn out?’ But what is my job essentially? It is ultimately about formulating common rules, which apply to us all, which ensure justice and which protect the weakest in our society. The focus is on people. When do we lock someone up? Under what conditions can someone seek protection in our country? To what extent does the state encroach on an individual’s privacy? Answering all these questions not only requires an understanding of the law, but also the ability to put oneself in the others’ situation. To do that you have to have pleasure in working for and with people – and that I have in abundance!
The largest share of social security costs consists of AHV, IV and premium reductions on compulsory health insurance.

The debt brake requires the Confederation to balance expenditure and revenue over the economic cycle.
MILESTONES IN SWITZERLAND’S HISTORY

From an alliance of states to a federal state

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1815 Congress of Vienna: defining the borders
Switzerland’s neutrality and the inviolability of its territory were internationally recognised in 1815. Most of the currently valid national and cantonal borders were defined (with the exception of the Jura, created in 1979, and the Laufental).
1848 Federal Constitution: a federal state with democratic rights
The modern federal state was founded with the adoption of the Federal Constitution by the people. It provided most citizens (men) with various rights and freedoms, such as voting and election rights, freedom of the press and freedom of religion. The bicameral system, based on the American model, was introduced at federal level with the National Council and Council of States, which elected the Federal Council. Some areas were centralised. Switzerland started to become a unified judicial and economic area.

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

End of the 19th century: establishment of political parties
The various political movements organised themselves as parties. The Social Democratic Party (SP) was founded in 1888, the Radical Free Democratic Party (FDP) in 1894, the Catholic-Conservative People's Party (today's Christian Democratic People's Party, CVP) in 1912 and the Farmers', Trades' and Citizens' Party (today's Swiss People's Party, SVP) in 1917/1918.

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

1939–45 World War II: more power for the Federal Council
Switzerland did not become involved militarily in the Second World War and was one of the few functioning democracies on the continent. Parliament granted the Federal Council powers that normally fell within the jurisdiction of parliament, and elected the first Social Democrat to the Federal Council.

1959 Federal Council composed of four parties
After the Federal Council elections in 1959, the Federal Council was composed of representatives of the four strongest parties: 2 FDP, 2 CVP, 2 SP, 1 SVP. This constellation (‘magic formula’) remained unchanged until 2003.

1971 Introduction of women's suffrage
Women obtained the right to vote and to participate in elections at national level in 1971. In a number of communes and cantons, men and women already enjoyed equal political rights before this date.

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

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

2002 Yes to UN membership
In 2002 the people and the cantons approved Switzerland’s accession to the United Nations (UN). Since then Switzerland has been actively involved in the United Nations as a full member.

From state emblem to logo
In 1815 the Swiss cross, as the emblem of the state, became the symbol of the solidarity of the cantons (1). From 1840, the flags of the federal troops featured a white cross on a red background with gold letters for each canton (2). The Swiss cross has been used as the national emblem since the federal decree of 1889 (3). Today, the Swiss cross is often used as a symbol of high quality, e.g. for Switzerland Tourism (4). Since 2007, it has been part of the logo of the Federal Administration (5).
CODETERMINATION STARTS YOUNG

Swiss democracy
At a secondary school in Brugg, in the canton of Aargau, decisions are taken democratically. The school council, made up of representatives from all classes, is in the process of voting on whether to submit a request to the head teacher for mobile phones to be allowed in school. The young representatives meet every two weeks to debate aspects of school life that they are allowed to have a say in. This continual participation at all levels on the part of the population is one of the cornerstones of Swiss democracy. Whether in neighbourhood associations, at communal assemblies or in communal, cantonal and national votes, the majority decides the rules by which society lives together. Decisions that have been taken democratically have to be accepted, regardless of whether you agree with them or not. The children at this school are learning these values in a light-hearted manner, precisely because democracy is anything but child’s play.
Switzerland is a federal state: state power is divided between the federal government, cantons and communes. The cantons and communes have wide-ranging powers and their own sources of income. The cantons are always involved in decisions that affect the whole of Switzerland. Federalism unites diversity in one entity. In Switzerland, with its four linguistic cultures and huge geographical differences, it is the prerequisite for living side-by-side.

2324 communes

Communes are the smallest political units in Switzerland. There are currently 2324 communes, but their number is in decline as smaller communes are tending to merge together in order to carry out their tasks more efficiently. Roughly one fifth of the communes have their own parliament, especially the communes that are towns or cities. Four fifths of the communes, however, still make direct democratic decisions at the communal assembly, where all inhabitants who are entitled to vote may participate. In other words, the People are not represented by councillors, but make decisions themselves and elect the executive. In addition to the tasks that are allocated to them by the Confederation and their canton, such as managing the registry of residents or organising civil defence, the communes also have their own responsibilities, including those relating to schools, social 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 unit is the states, which are known as cantons. They are the states that originally united in 1848 to form the Confederation, each relinquishing part of their sovereignty to the Confederation. Jura is an exception. It is the only canton that was created in the 20th century, when in 1979 it separated from the canton of Bern. Under the Federal Constitution, all cantons have equal rights, and in comparison with the situation in other countries, they have a high degree of independence. Health care, education and culture are among the policy areas where they enjoy a large degree of latitude. Each canton has its own constitution, and its own parliament, government and courts. The size of the parliament varies between 50 and 180 members, who are all elected by the People, in most cantons in a system of proportional representation. The cantonal governments are also all elected by the People, in most cases in a majority system. 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 by post or at the ballot box.
1 Confederation

The Confederation is the name given to the Swiss state. CH is the abbreviation of Switzerland’s official Latin name ‘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 lower political unit, i.e. the cantons.
DIRECT DEMOCRACY AT FEDERAL LEVEL

One People, many rights

Switzerland is virtually the only country in the world where the electorate has 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 broad range of media services are crucial to the proper functioning of this particular system of government. Swiss nationals have the following political rights at federal level:

Elections
or accumulating votes, vote-splitting and deleting names

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

In the cantons with more than one seat in the National Council, eligible voters have a number of options to nominate their favourite candidates:

They may indicate the names of their preferred candidates in a blank list.

They may use a preprinted list of candidates provided by a specific party, with or without making any changes to the list.

The lists may be modified in three different ways, which may be combined:

Firstly, names can be deleted from the list. Secondly, votes can be split, which means that votes are cast for members of different parties; in other words, a voter can take a name from one list and enter it on another list.

Thirdly, candidates may be accumulated, in other words, they can be entered twice on a list. Parties themselves may also list candidates twice (but no more than twice), thus accumulating votes in advance to enhance their election prospects.

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

Voting
or if you feel strongly about something

Those who are entitled to take part in parliamentary elections may also cast their vote in popular ballots, i.e. all Swiss citizens who have turned 18 and are not incapacitated on grounds of mental illness or debility.

Eligible voters are generally called on four times a year to vote on federal proposals. On average these votes involve three to four proposals that may be adopted or rejected; although in exceptional cases, there may be more than twice that many. Votes are held on people’s initiatives and referendums:

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

New laws and amendments to existing laws and similar parliamentary decisions, along with certain international treaties, are only put to the vote if required by an optional referendum. A popular majority is sufficient for such a proposal to be accepted.
Petition
Everyone is entitled to address written requests, suggestions and complaints to the authorities – not just those eligible to vote. The authorities in turn are required to take due note of such petitions, and although there is no law to say a response must be given, in practice every petition is considered and does receive a reply. The petition may relate to any activity of the state.

Popular initiatives or making law the Swiss way

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

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

A popular initiative may be formulated as a general proposal or – much more often – be presented as 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 a majority of the People and cantons will support that instead. Since 1987, the possibility of a double ‘yes’ vote has existed in ballots on popular initiatives: voters may approve both the initiative and the counter-proposal. A deciding question determines which of the two texts will enter into force if both secure a popular majority and a majority of the cantons.

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

Referendums or voicing disagreement

The People are entitled to have their say on parliamentary decisions. Federal legislation, decisions of parliament and certain international treaties are subject to an optional referendum: in this case, a popular 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 safe-guarding 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.
WHAT POLITICAL INTERESTS ARE REPRESENTED BY WHOM

The four strongest political parties...

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

SVP Swiss People’s Party

The Swiss People’s Party emerged in 1971 from the Farmers’ Trades’ and Citizens’ Party. It is the largest party in Switzerland with a 26.6% share of the vote and represents 648,675 voters.

The SVP is committed to an independent and neutral Switzerland and is firmly against Switzerland creeping towards membership of the EU. The debt and financial crisis in Europe shows just how important a streamlined state with healthy finances, low taxes and a high degree of legal certainty is if Switzerland is to remain a strong business location with safe jobs. In February 2014 the people and the cantons adopted an amendment to the Constitution, requiring that Switzerland should again have control over immigration. This must now be implemented. Swiss workers should no longer be pushed aside and the burden on our social system should not be any greater. In addition, crime by foreigners and abuse of the asylum system are now commonplace. The SVP calls for improved public safety through the deportation of convicted foreign nationals and the tightening of the Criminal Code.

With this clear policy based on conservative values the SVP wants to safeguard our country’s prosperity, jobs and future.

Ueli Maurer represents the SVP in the Federal Council. With only one seat in the Federal Council the party does not have its fair share of government responsibility, but hopes to correct this situation in the upcoming 2015 elections.

SP Swiss Social Democratic Party

Our slogan is ‘for the good of all, not just the few’. The SP is committed to a society in which each and every individual is free to shape their lives; to a society of cooperation not discord; to a society that is respectful of people who are less fortunate. In short, the SP is committed to a progressive, supportive and open society.

Switzerland has a solid social net and good public infrastructure. The SP has made a large contribution in this respect. Without the SP there would be no old-age pension, no maternity insurance and no votes for women. This is because the SP has always been the party that has stood up for more democracy and self-determination, not just in politics, but in all areas of society. True democracy hinges on the co-determination of the members of society, also in the business world.

The SP will continue its commitment to improving the daily lives of people in our country, by seeking to provide access to affordable housing, to guarantee safe pensions and good working conditions, to effectively protect the environment, to provide more equality, and to set an example of openness and optimism.

Our policies are not based on the special interests of an elite. Our strength as a society hinges on our shared responsibility within the family, at work and in politics. That is why the SP pursues policies for the good of all, not just the few.
FDP The Liberals

FDP. The Liberals stand for ‘Freedom, Community and Progress’. People should be able to determine their own lives responsibly. In Switzerland, people from different cultures and regions, and who speak different languages should be able to grow together to form a community through their own free will. Innovation should be supported by the belief in progress, and not stymied by restrictions. Didier Burkhalter and Johann Schneider-Ammann represent the liberal movement in the Federal Council. We want:

• Secure jobs. The FDP wants everyone in Switzerland to have good prospects – and this means having work. It is not politicians who create jobs, but the country’s many businesses both large and small. We work to strengthen Switzerland’s appeal as a business location and financial centre. We want better schools, lower taxes, liberal labour laws and advocate the bilateral path. Support for the bilateral agreements must go hand-in-hand with a tough but fair migration policy, better infrastructure, and encouragement for women and older people to participate in the labour market.

• Sound social services. Mountains of debt have already been accumulated due to invalidity and unemployment insurance. The old age pension fund awaits a similar fate in the not too distant future. We must put a stop to this! Reforms are needed across all social institutions and pension funds so that future pensions can be safeguarded.

• Less red tape. A flood of regulations and prohibitions restricts our freedom on a daily basis and costs our SMEs billions each year. Personal initiative and entrepreneurship are constrained. The FDP wants simple rules and swift procedures.

CVP Christian Democratic People’s Party

The CVP focuses on families and middle-income groups. As a business-oriented party with a liberal-social outlook it seeks a balance between individuals and society, personal responsibility and solidarity. Its approach to coexistence is based on a Christian view of humanity and society. The party is committed to the internal and external security of the country. The CVP is represented in the Federal Council by Doris Leuthard, who holds the important environment, transport, energy and communications portfolio. Main themes:

• Families: These form the backbone of our society and therefore need a strong framework, which includes a good work-life balance, low taxes and strong purchasing power.

• Economy: New, secure jobs and prosperity generated through innovation. In order to promote Switzerland’s economy and our SMEs, the CVP strives for attractive levels of taxation, outstanding infrastructure and education.

• Social security: The CVP believes that the sustainable financing and preservation of social institutions is the greatest challenge in the coming years. This can only be accomplished through targeted reforms and by avoiding unrealistic expansion or cutbacks.

• Environment policy: The CVP has long been committed to preserving the planet and pursuing a sustainable climate and environment policy. Ecological and economic interests must be reconciled.
... as well as the seven other political parties in parliament

The Greens  Swiss Green Party

Co-Presidents: Adèle Thorens Goumaz / Regula Rytz (members of the National Council)  Founded in 1983

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

The Green Liberals are committed to sustainable development, and strive to address social, economic and environmental goals on an equal footing. The basis for this are an innovative and sustainable market economy, a vibrant democracy, careful management of our environment and a tolerant and caring society. We want to live in a pluralistic society where a high value is placed on individual freedom and individual responsibility. We have a duty to make sure we do not pass on a legacy of pollution and debt so that future generations can also enjoy life.

The BDP was among the winners of the federal elections in October 2011, immediately securing a 5.4 per cent share of the vote. It is a modern, conservative party that takes account of social change and environmental challenges, without jettisoning all basic conservative values. The BDP strongly supports the bilateral agreements with Europe. It wants a responsible economic policy, a sustainable energy policy, forward-looking spatial planning and a credible security policy. The focus is not on demands, but on solutions. The BDP is the youngest Federal Council party and is represented in the national government by Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf.

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

Work and security: the border regions, Ticino in particular, pay a high price for the free movement of persons within Europe. The local population is subjected to growing levels of imported and increasingly unscrupulous crime. Switzerland must regain control over immigration. We must be able to limit the amount of cross-border traffic.

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.

Mobility: the planned overhaul of the Gotthard road tunnel in the coming years means that the construction of a second tube – without increasing capacity – is essential.

Christian Social Party Obwalden

The Christian Social Party Obwalden is an independent political party founded in 1956. It consists of six communal sections. It has been active as an independent parliamentary group in the Obwalden cantonal parliament since 1982. It is not a member of the CSP Switzerland. The CSP’s policies are in line with the principles of Christian social ethics, placing particular importance on solidarity, justice and sustainability.

Citizen’s Movement of French-speaking Switzerland

We are neither right-wing nor left-wing, but are instead committed to social policies, a strong economy and exemplary public safety.

We are in favour of a single medical insurance fund and seek a review of the bilateral agreements with the EU. We are against European competition and the wave of cross-border commuters from neighbouring EU countries and seek to defend the national workforce.

We want an independent, sovereign Switzerland. It is for that reason that we founded the Citizen’s Movement of French-speaking Switzerland and the umbrella organisation, the Federation of Citizen’s Movements of the Alpine Region.
THE LEGISLATURE: NATIONAL COUNCIL AND COUNCIL OF STATES

Parliament
The Council of States is known to have its own special culture. Although it is often the scene of heated debate, a tone of mutual respect is always preserved among the members. In a debate they do not battle against another member, but rather against a political position which opposes their own. There are good reasons for this: various rituals have become established over the years, which have helped create this special culture in the small chamber.

On the last day of a parliamentary session, for example, the 46 members of the Council of States gather in the middle of the chamber, roughly forming an inner and an outer circle. They then walk round in opposite directions – hence the name of the ritual, the ‘carousel’ – exchanging a few words with each other, saying goodbye and wishing each other well until the next session of parliament with a shake of the hand or a kiss on the cheek.
Two chambers – one parliament

Representing the people and the cantons

Switzerland’s parliament or legislature consists of two chambers, which are equal, yet very different in their own way: the people’s representatives sit in the National Council, the large chamber, and the representatives of the cantons sit in the Council of States, the small chamber. When they sit together in joint session, they constitute the United Federal Assembly. The 246 members of parliament represent the interests of various language communities, political parties, world views and faiths.

The 200 members of the National Council represent the roughly 8 million people living in Switzerland – each member of the National Council represents around 40,000 people. The largest delegation, which is from the canton of Zurich, has 34 members. As the Constitution states that every canton is entitled to at least one seat in the National Council, even Appenzell Innerrhoden, which only has a population of around 16,000, also sends a people’s representative to Bern.

The 46 members of the Council of States represent the cantons. There are two representatives per canton, although even here there is an exception: as former half-cantons, the cantons of Obwalden, Nidwalden, Basel-Stadt, Basel-Landschaft, Appenzell Ausserrhoden and Appenzell Innerrhoden each have only one seat. Today, the members of the Council of States are directly elected. In the past some were not elected by the people, but by a cantonal authority. This was the case in the canton of Bern, for example, where until 1979, members were elected by the cantonal parliament.

The National Council and the Council of States generally sit separately, but they do handle certain items of business sitting in joint session as the United Federal Assembly, such as when electing the members of the Federal Council and the federal courts. As such, the Federal Assembly is the highest authority in the Swiss Confederation subject to the rights of the people and the cantons. This is an aspect peculiar to Switzerland: in contrast to other countries, the Swiss parliament elects the government and the members of the supreme court. Parliament’s decisions are not subject to review by any court. Furthermore, parliament cannot be dissolved before the end of a legislature period.

Newly elected members of parliament swear an oath or take a vow on taking up their seat.

“I hereby swear to uphold the Constitution, abide by the laws of the land and fulfil the duties of my office to the best of my ability.”

“I swear by almighty God to uphold the Constitution, abide by the laws of the land and fulfil the duties of my office to the best of my ability.”
MAJORITY SYSTEM AND PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Two voting systems

Fresh elections every four years

Elections to the National Council take place every four years according to harmonised national rules under a system of proportional representation. Each canton forms a constituency and receives at least one seat. Elections to the Council of States are held according to cantonal law, which is why it is not strictly possible to speak of general elections. Apart from in the cantons of Jura and Neuchâtel, elections to the Council of States are held under a majority or first-past-the-post system. Elections are held in all cantons at the same time as the National Council elections; only in Appenzell Innerrhoden is the cantonal representative determined at a later date. There is therefore no full election for the Council of States and consequently no legislature period.

There are significant differences between the two chambers in terms of the party political make-up, due in part to the electoral system: in the National Council the SVP is currently by far the strongest party with 57 members, followed by the SP with 46, the FDP-Liberals with 30 and the CVP with 29 representatives. However, in the Council of States the CVP has 13 seats, the FDP and SP 11 each, and the SVP 6. The remaining seats are split between the Greens, the GLP and the BDP.

Elections to the National Council are always held in the autumn so that the newly constituted parliament can meet for the winter session in December. There are a total of four ordinary three-week sessions – usually in March, June, September and December. In addition, an extraordinary session lasting several days is often held between the spring and summer sessions to reduce the backlog of business. Each chamber is free to decide whether or not it wishes to hold an extraordinary session. An extraordinary session can also be convened if a quarter of a council’s members so demand it, or if the Federal Council has urgent matters to put before parliament.

United Federal Assembly

The United Federal Assembly sits in the National Council chamber. While the members of the National Council sit in their usual seats, the members of the Council of States take up seats allocated to their respective cantons around the back wall of the chamber. The sessions are chaired by the President of the National Council, which is why he or she is referred to as the highest ranking person in the country.

Majority system and proportional representation

Under the **majority system** (first-past-the-post) the person elected is the one with the most votes. This method tends to favour large parties and well-known candidates.

Under **proportional representation** seats are allocated according to the number of votes received by the parties and then to the best-placed candidates in those parties. This system enables even small parties to enter parliament.

Following the general elections at the end of a legislature period around 30 per cent of seats go to new members. In the course of a legislature period around 10 per cent of council members step down and are replaced.

Sessions 2015

- Spring session: 2 – 20 March
- Special session: 4 – 7 May
- Summer session: 1 – 19 June
- Autumn session: 7 – 25 September
- Winter session: 30 November – 18 December

(9 December: General election of the Federal Council and the Federal Chancellor and the election of the President of the Swiss Confederation and Vice President of the Federal Council)

Elections to the National Council will be held on 18 October 2015. Elections to the Council of States will also be held on that day in most cantons.

www.ch.ch/election2015 offers practical tips on voting rules, explanations about the workings of parliament and election results on the day.
HOW PARLIAMENT IS ORGANISED

Elected – what now?

Parliamentary bodies

Any large group needs rules in order to function properly, and the same is true of parliament: each member of parliament is allocated a seat in the chamber, with members of the same party usually grouped together. At the first session of the new legislature period, each chamber elects a president and the members of the Council Office. The president chairs the council meetings. He or she is supported by the council secretariat and may be represented by one of the vice presidents if necessary.

The Office, an important body behind the scenes, takes decisions on the session’s agenda and therefore sets the timetable for debates. It appoints the members of the committees and delegations and also instructs them on which items of business are to be prepared between the sessions. The council offices comprise the president and vice presidents, the tellers and – in the case of the National Council – the leaders of the parliamentary groups.

The members of a party or parties with similar views form parliamentary groups. At least five members from one council are needed to form a parliamentary group. The level of financial support that these groups receive for their political work depends on their size. In the National Council only members of a parliamentary group have the right to express their views on an item of business; furthermore, membership of a parliamentary group is also a prerequisite to be granted a seat on a committee. It is therefore only really possible for members to play an active role if they belong to a parliamentary group. That is why parties with fewer than five members of parliament are keen to join a group. They are also courted because the more members a parliamentary group has, the more seats they are entitled to on committees and the greater influence they have on council business.

Given the volume of business they have to deal with, often on technical issues, it is difficult for council members to reach an informed opinion. Before an item of business comes before the council, it is therefore discussed within the parliamentary groups with the aim of agreeing on a common position, which can be supported by the members of the group in the chamber and before the media and general public. However, when the matter is voted on in the chamber, members are not instructed how to vote. The constitution states that council members may not vote on the instruction of another person; their vote may therefore deviate from the position of their parliamentary group or canton.

The committees provide an opportunity for matters to be discussed in greater detail, to clarify specific issues, hear experts from the administration or from the interest groups concerned, and address questions to federal councillors. They also serve as a testing ground to see whether a majority can be found for certain positions or ideas across party lines.

Competences

The tasks of parliament and its procedural rules are set out in the Parliament Act. In addition, each chamber has its own standing orders. The main role of parliament is to enact legislation. The spectrum is wide, ranging from Swiss abroad to civilian service, environmental protection to motorway building, war material to peace promotion.

However, parliament is also responsible for:

• releasing funding (budget) and approving the state accounts;
• oversight of the Federal Council, administration and federal courts;
• electing the members of the Federal Council and the federal courts and the Federal Chancellor;
• international agreements for which the Federal Council is not responsible and
• fostering relations with foreign parliaments.
Training for the top job

Presiding over the chamber is a demanding job, but the term of office is limited to one year. Given that there is a first and second vice president is also elected, there is effectively a two-year training period in which the future office holder has time to learn the ropes as a member of the Council Office. So despite the frequent rotations a large degree of continuity is maintained. In the Council of States this training period can even last four or five years as the tellers and deputy tellers move up the waiting list for the role of Council President.

Women in parliament

Women in Switzerland have only had the right to vote and be elected since 1971. Their share of seats in parliament has risen from 5 per cent in 1971 to 31 per cent today. In comparison, on average roughly 22 per cent of parliamentary seats worldwide are held by women; that figure is around 40 per cent in the Scandinavian countries. The country with the highest share of women in parliament is Ruanda at over 60 per cent.

Is parliament getting younger?

Around twenty years ago, most members of parliament were between 40 and 60 years old; in the 1920s a fifth of representatives were under 40. Today there is a relatively even spread of age groups. The youngest member of parliament is currently 27; the oldest is 83.
Two equals

Same powers – different cultures

The two-chamber system creates a balance between the large and small cantons and gives more power to the various linguistic regions. A two-chamber system is not always the norm – in many countries, parliament has only one chamber. Where there are two chambers, generally speaking the larger chamber, which in most cases represents the electorate, has more to say than the smaller chamber, which often represents the regions. In Switzerland, the situation is different: both chambers have the same powers, and deal with the same business in the same way. This also applies to budgetary matters. The two councils take turns to debate items of business first. Both councils must reach reconcilable decisions if the decisions are to be valid. Even the individual members of the Council of States and the National Council have the same rights: any member can submit a draft law or mandate to the Federal Council. Two chambers with completely equal rights are also found in the United States Congress, where the Senate and House of Representatives have identical powers. In Europe on the other hand, Switzerland is the only country that has this system. Even the cantons have only one chamber of parliament.
Draft laws are debated up to three times by each council so that identical decisions can ultimately be reached. Sometimes this can be difficult, but in most cases it can be achieved because each council is ready to make compromises and adjustments, even though neither chamber operates in quite the same way. Due to differences in their political composition, they often do not reach the same result when they vote. In addition, the Council of States is more representative of the cantons than the National Council. The size of the chambers also has an influence: the 46 members of the Council of States can speak out at any time on any matter, whereas complex rules apply on when the 200 members of the National Council are allowed to speak, which leads to less spontaneity in the voting. For this reason, it is easier to influence the result of a vote in the Council of States by presenting strong arguments than in the National Council.

It often takes quite some time before both chambers agree on identical wording for a new law. But when the decision has finally been taken and the hurdle of a potential referendum has been overcome, the new law has proper substance. The predictability and stability of political decisions is a key factor in Switzerland’s success and prosperity.
Parliamentary instruments

Any member of the National Council or the Council of States can make a procedural request to introduce a new law, add a new provision into the Constitution, or to have an existing law amended. They can also request the Federal Council or the administration to provide a report or information.

A member of parliament can use a parliamentary initiative to propose that parliament itself should enact a law – either by formulating the idea or even drafting the law itself. With a motion, a member of parliament can assign the role of lawmaker to the Federal Council. A postulate is used to request the Federal Council to examine whether a new law or decree should be drafted or measures taken, while an interpellation is a request to the Federal Council to provide information on significant domestic or international events.

Majority support is required to follow up on procedural requests: in the preliminary consultation committees, or in either or both councils. As procedural requests generally relate to politically controversial matters, however, there is no guarantee that a majority can be secured.

Enthusiastic use is made of parliamentary instruments: in 1995 each member of parliament filed an average of 3.9 procedural requests every year. By 2009, the high water mark (so far), this number had risen to 9.4. It then fell a little to 8 procedural requests per year and member in 2011. Overall in 2014, 1456 procedural requests were dealt with.

In response to every procedural request, the Federal Council and the Administration have to conduct inquiries and issue an opinion before the matter can be discussed and decided on, first in the relevant committee and then in the council. Many long hours of work must therefore be put in before a procedural request is either accepted or rejected.

The engine room of parliament: the committees

Many people may be surprised to find the chambers of the National Council and Council of States half empty and wonder if anyone is doing any work there. By the time any proposal is discussed in the councils, most of the parliamentary work has already been done, and many preliminary decisions have already been taken. This is the committees’ job, as they conduct initial discussions on all items of business.

There are nine legislative committees, whose main task is to make a preliminary examination of legislative proposals. They are each responsible for a specific topic, such as transport, legal affairs, foreign or social policy, etc. In addition, there are the finance committee and the control committee, which oversee the federal finances and the activities of the Federal Council and the Administration.

In specific cases, a parliamentary investigation committee can be given special powers to investigate certain procedures and sectors.

In contrast to sessions of the National Council and Council of States, committee sessions are not open to the public – holding meetings in camera is thought to facilitate a more open discussion among members. However, after meetings, the committees inform the media of the outcome.

National Council committees comprise 25 members each, while those in the Council of States have 13 members. Their composition depends on the relative strengths of the parliamentary groups. Between parliamentary sessions, the committees meet once or twice for a day or two. Committee members can submit proposals on any of the legislative texts they are discussing, either relating to the text in its entirety or to individual points. If a proposal is rejected, it can be made again when the matter is discussed in the council.
A part-time parliament

Switzerland’s parliament is a part-time parliament: its members dedicate a great deal of time to their parliamentary work, but most continue to pursue other professional activities. Due to the high workload – and the increasingly complex range of subject matter – some occasionally question the present system and call for a professional parliament. The counter argument is that part-time politicians are more grounded and accessible and able to make a valuable contribution to debates due to their professional experience and expertise.

Honour and burden: how much time do council members spend in Bern?

The members of the Federal Assembly gather in Bern four times a year for their three-week sessions, and if necessary for a two- or three-day extraordinary session. The number of days on which the councils meet each year has remained more or less the same since the founding of the federal state in 1848, although the workload and complexity of the items of business have increased significantly.

In addition to their attendance during the sessions, council members also have to come to Bern for committee meetings. Whereas in the past committees were formed to work on specific bills, most are now standing committees. Members of the National Council sit on one to two committees, while their colleagues in the Council of States sit on three to four committees. This means that National Council members are in Bern for an additional 30 to 50 days a year, and those in the Council of States are in the capital for an extra 40 to 70 days a year.

How much a member of parliament earns

In line with the relevant regulations, members of parliament are entitled to the following remuneration:

- Annual salary to prepare for parliamentary work: CHF 260,000
- Daily allowance for council and committee attendance: CHF 440
- Annual allowance for staff and material expenses: CHF 33,000

On top of that there are allowances for food, travel and accommodation, pension fund as well as additional expense allowances for council and committee presidents and vice presidents. A portion of those allowances are tax free. Depending on the number of attendance days and the council member’s functions, the salary and allowances can amount to between CHF 130,000 and 150,000 a year.
WHO GOES IN AND OUT OF THE FEDERAL PALACE

An open house

The ‘conference room of the nation’

Bern has been the home of Switzerland’s political activities since 1848. The councils have held their meetings in the Federal Palace since 1902. The building was originally intended to serve not only as the seat of parliament, but of the whole Federal Administration. Even in an age of chatrooms, Skype and social media, there is still a need for a place where members of parliament can gather to hold meetings and discussions, but also have informal chats.

The Federal Palace is above all the nation’s meeting place: in addition to the parliamentary sessions held in the two largest chambers, around 2000 meetings a year are held in the many other conference rooms. The Federal Palace also has an important ceremonial and not least a social function: given its architecture it lends itself as a stage for the nation’s political proceedings. Council sessions are public and attract a great deal of public interest. Politicians meet with visitors groups from their home cantons, and foreign delegations are received in the richly decorated rooms. The lobby and restaurant provide a setting for more informal discussions, and there are also places where council members can sit down to work.

Wherever there are political goings-on the media are never far behind. For a number of years now a large, modern media centre has been set up on Bundesgasse, but camera teams can also be found in the Federal Palace itself most days looking for politicians to interview.

Lobbyists representing the interests of associations, businesses or other organisations in parliament also come and go: each member of parliament is entitled to name two people who are able to enter the Parliament Building as guests.
The hub of parliamentary activity

From IT support to preparing and following up on committee meetings – the Parliamentary Services support council members in fulfilling their duties. In terms of the separation of powers they are answerable to parliament and operate independently of the Federal Council and the Federal Administration.

The start of a new term of office for a newly elected member of the Federal Assembly is comparable with starting a new job: the new deputy has a host of questions, is inundated with information, expected to hit the ground running, but first has to become acquainted with how parliament works. At the start of a new legislature period, the Parliamentary Services with its 311 staff (213 full-time equivalents) has a great deal to do.

When parliament is in session, all the various units of the Parliamentary Services are kept busy: from the front desk to the desks of the council presidents, from council members’ workstations to the restaurant, from the smallest to the largest meeting rooms – behind the scenes and front of house.

The debates are written up while the session is still in progress and published in the Official Bulletin, so that individual statements and the results of the votes can be read online at www.parlament.ch around an hour later.

Diverse range of services

Things are slightly calmer in between sessions, but even then there are often committee meetings. These are usually prepared by the relevant committee secretariats with practical support provided by the team of ushers. In order to prepare for the committee meetings, members are provided with all the necessary documentation so they can familiarise themselves with the varied subject matter, such as reports from federal offices, articles from the press or specialist literature and the minutes of earlier meetings. Council members can request personalised documentation packs and advice for more in-depth information, or to help prepare for visits at home or abroad.

The work of the Parliamentary Services also includes drafting press releases, arranging press conferences, organising visits by Swiss delegations abroad and receiving foreign delegations in Bern. Here too the Parliamentary Services assist council members in word and deed.

Information online and in all official languages

Council members can find most of the information they need on the intranet. Each member of parliament receives a laptop if they wish or at least the necessary codes to login to parliament’s IT network. A team of IT staff and web specialists is responsible for running and maintaining the entire IT infrastructure for the Parliamentary Services and the secretariats of the parliamentary groups. The parliament website also has to be kept up to date so that the public can find out about parliamentary business, council members and events. During the sessions debates are streamed live online.

Council members speak before parliament and in the committees in their own language. During sessions in the National Council, interpreters provide simultaneous translation of statements in the three official languages of German, French and Italian. Most documents are also translated.

The public can follow what their representatives are doing not only through the media and online, but also in person from the gallery. Council members receive individual visitors or groups at the Parliament Building and visitors can also find out more about the building and proceedings by taking a guided tour.

A large number of people from different walks of life pass through the doors of the Federal Palace: council members, representatives of different interest groups and the media, civil servants and visitors. For an open building such as this a certain number of security measures and staff have to be in place. The building also has to be looked after. The activities that take centre stage would not be possible without all the work done behind the scenes: work would soon grind to a halt if the wastepaper baskets were never emptied, if there was no heating in winter or if there was nowhere to get a coffee …

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HOW NEW LAWS COME ABOUT

The total revision of the CO₂ Act

Bringing in new legislation is a complex and at times protracted business. The process takes at least twelve months, but it has been known to take as long as ten years or more. In the following example, it took five years for an existing law to be replaced by a new one. The total revision of the 1999 CO₂ Act was begun in 2008. The revised law came into force at the beginning of 2013. Under the new law, CO₂ emissions must be reduced by at least 20% compared to 1990 levels by 2020.

1. Federal Council mandate
   - What: Federal Council mandate
   - Who: Federal Council, Federal Administration (DETEC)
   - When: February 2008

   The first step is taken by someone who believes there is a need for a new piece of legislation or for an existing act to be amended. This can be an individual member of the electorate, interest groups, members of parliament, or sections of the administration, cantons or the Federal Council. In this case it is the Federal Council that in February 2008 instructs the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications DETEC to prepare a draft revision of the CO₂ Act. The Federal Office for the Environment FOEN, which is part of DETEC, is charged with this task. At the same time, a committee submits the popular initiative ‘For a healthy climate’ to the Federal Chancellery – with 115,689 valid signatures.

2. Consultation
   - What: Consultation
   - Who: Federal Council, Federal Administration (DETEC)
   - When: December 2008

   The Federal Council commissions DETEC to conduct consultation proceedings on the draft revision of the CO₂ Act. The draft revision provides for two alternatives: the first places emphasis on emissions reduction measures on the domestic front, and the second focuses on compensating domestic emissions by purchasing certificates abroad. During the consultation proceedings, the cantons, federal courts, political parties, business federations and other organisations are all able to submit their comments on the draft and propose amendments. At the same time, the Federal Council rejects the ‘healthy climate’ popular initiative because it could prove to be too rigid both in terms of both domestic and foreign policy. The Federal Council therefore intends to submit the revised CO₂ Act to the Federal Assembly as an indirect counter-proposal to the popular initiative.

3. Draft
   - What: Draft
   - Who: Federal Administration (DETEC)
   - When: May–August 2009

   The FOEN compiles the roughly 200 responses received to the consultation into a report. Responses are overwhelmingly in favour of the first alternative, whereby emissions reduction is achieved mainly through measures taken in Switzerland. The FOEN drafts a dispatch on Swiss climate policy after 2012. On the one hand, the dispatch lays out the ‘healthy climate’ popular initiative and recommends that it be rejected; on the other, it outlines the draft developed as an indirect counter-proposal to amend the CO₂ Act.

4. Dispatch
   - What: Dispatch
   - Who: Federal Council
   - When: August 2009

   The Federal Council approves the dispatch on Swiss climate policy after 2012, together with the draft total revision of the CO₂ Act and the federal decision on the rejection of the recommended popular initiative. The Presiding Colleges of the National Council and the Council of States notify the National Council of the item of business, as this will be the first of the two chambers to address it.

5. Preliminary examination
   - What: Preliminary examination
   - Who: Committee of first chamber (here: National Council)
   - When: October 2009

   The Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy Committee of the National Council (CESPE-N) conducts the preliminary examination of the modification of the CO₂ Act and the popular initiative and consults the ‘Climate Initiative’ committee, as well as other interested parties. The National Council deliberates on the amendment of the act in the spring and summer sessions 2010 and decides to discuss the popular initiative at a later date. Unlike the Federal Council, it intends to achieve a reduction in emissions through domestic measures alone and decides on a goal of a 20% reduction. At the same time, it incorporates an option in the draft act, allowing the Federal Council to increase the reduction goal up to 40% if necessary.

6. Discussion
   - What: Discussion
   - Who: First chamber (here: National Council)
   - When: June 2010

   On 1 June 2010, the National Council adopts the draft revised version of the CO₂ Act as an indirect counter-proposal to the healthy climate popular initiative and decides to extend the deadline for addressing the popular initiative by a year.
Traffic accounts for a third of total greenhouse gas emissions. Although individual vehicles emit lower levels of CO₂, overall emissions have increased since 1990 as there has been a sharp rise in the number of vehicles on the road and in the number of kilometres travelled.

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

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

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

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

The proposal is published in the Federal Gazette, which marks the beginning of the referendum period; if at least 50,000 members of the electorate demand a referendum within 100 days, the revised law will be put to the vote by the People.

Due to the delays caused by the resolution of differences, the National Council and Council of States approve an additional extension of a year to address the ‘healthy climate’ popular initiative. The two chambers finally adopt the draft proposal for the federal decree on the popular initiative. The Federal Assembly declares the validity of the popular initiative and recommends that the people and the cantons reject the initiative.

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

The referendum period for the revised CO₂ Act expires without having been used. The ‘healthy climate’ initiative is therefore withdrawn. The revised CO₂ Act takes effect from 1 January 2013.
THE ORIGINS OF THE FEDERAL PALACE

Stage by stage

The Parliament Building – the heart of the Federal Palace

The Federal Palace, the seat of Parliament and the Swiss government, is considered to be one of the most significant historical buildings in Switzerland. It consists of three elements, which are linked by raised covered walkways: the West Wing, the Parliament Building and the East Wing. In contrast to most other countries with a bicameral system, both chambers are housed under the same roof.

On 28 November 1848 the Federal Assembly, in the first round of voting, chose Bern to be the capital city and therefore the seat of the federal authorities. As there were no suitable existing buildings in Bern to house the government, Parliament and the Federal Administration, provisional solutions at first had to be found. The Erlacherhof on Junkergasse was made available to the Federal Council, the National Council met in ‘Casino’ music hall built in 1821 and occasionally in Bern’s town hall, while the Council of States met in the town hall ‘Zum Äusseren Stand’ on Zeughausgasse. The Federal Supreme Court and the various branches of the administration took up residence in various buildings in the old town.

In February 1849 the city authorities were commissioned with the task of finding an appropriate location for a central building with sufficient space to house both chambers of parliament, rooms for the Federal Council, 96 offices and an apartment for the Federal Chancellor. The site chosen by the Federal Council from a number of proposals was that of the town’s timber works next to the casino. On 8 April 1850 the city council launched a tender for designs for the ‘Bundes-Rathaus’ on the southern side of the old town on the edge of the escarpment above the River Aare.

Work on the construction of what is now the West Wing began in 1852 and was to house both chambers of parliament. The official inauguration took place a little over 5 years later on 5 June 1857. It was later joined by the mirror image East Wing in 1884.

The central Parliament Building, built according to plans drawn up by architect Hans Wilhelm Auer between 1894 and 1902, completed the inter-connected three-part complex that we see today. The Parliament Building is a monumental work in the neo-renaissance style with porticos and a prominent dome. The rich artistry and construction materials drawn from around the country underline the character of the building as a national monument and as a ‘federal palace’.

The architect’s intention in designing the Parliament Building was to replicate, figuratively, the whole of Switzerland. He drew up a plan of pictures and symbolic images covering three broad themes: the nation’s history based on founding myths, the constitutional foundations and general virtues of the state as well as Switzerland’s cultural, political, geographic and economic diversity.
THE EXECUTIVE: FEDERAL COUNCIL AND DEPARTMENTS

The Government
The members of the Federal Council are sitting in the antechamber to their meeting room. They can be seen chatting over coffee, the atmosphere seems relaxed. The 2015 photo of the Federal Council portrays a cabinet that is eager to come together to seek out the best solutions for the country. In a power-sharing government with representatives from five different parties, some of which have very different manifestos, this can be quite a challenge. Some items of business give rise to heated debate, yet the government has to reach agreement in the end. This requires a willingness to reach out across party lines, but Switzerland’s system of government is geared towards that. It is the only way that decisions will find the support of Parliament and the people. One of the highlights of this election year will take place on 9 December when the Federal Council and the Federal Chancellor stand for re-election by the United Federal Assembly.
The Federal Council

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

Simonetta Sommaruga
President of the Swiss Confederation
Head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police
Member of the SP
Federal Councillor since 2010

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

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

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

Ueli Maurer
Head of the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport
Member of the SVP
Federal Councillor since 2009

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

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

Corina Casanova
Federal Chancellor since 2008

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

* Swiss Liberal Party
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 Swiss Confederation at home and abroad.

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

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

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

Consensus

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

From one-party to multi-party government

Switzerland has not always had a multi-party government. After the founding of the federal state in 1848, the Federal Council consisted entirely of members of the Free Democratic Party for 43 years. The first Catholic-Conservative (today’s CVP) member joined the government in 1891, followed by a second in 1919. In 1929, the Federal Assembly elected a member of the Farmers’, Trades’ and Citizens’ Party (today’s SVP) to the Federal Council. In 1943, during the Second World War, the Social Democratic Party was also brought into the government. In 1959, the four parties agreed to form a government with two Free Democrats, two Christian Democrats, two Social Democrats and one member of the Swiss People’s Party (also known as the ‘magic formula’ 2:2:2:1). This constellation remained unchanged for 44 years. Then, in the 2003 Federal Council elections, the SVP won a seat from the CVP. In 2008, however, the two SVP representatives Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf and Samuel Schmid shifted their allegiance to the newly created BDP (Conservative Democratic Party). Since Samuel Schmid stepped down in 2009, the SVP has again had one seat in the Federal Council, held by Ueli Maurer. Since then, the formula has been: 2:2:1:1:1 (2 SP, 2 FDP, 1 CVP, 1 BDP, 1 SVP).
Where the 38 000-strong federal staff work

FDFA
Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
Didier Burkhalter
Head of Department

General Secretariat GS-FDFA
State Secretariat
Directorate of Political Affairs DP
Directorate of European Affairs DEA
Directorate of International Law DIL
Consular Directorate CD
Switzerland’s representations abroad
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC
Directorate of Corporate Resources DCR

FDHA
Federal Department of Home Affairs
Alain Berset
Head of Department

General Secretariat GS-FDHA
Federal Office for Gender Equality FÖGE

FDJP
Federal Department of Justice and Police
Simoneetta Sommaruga
Head of Department

General Secretariat GS-FDJP
State Secretariat for Migration SEM
Federal Office of Justice FOJ
Federal Office of Police Fadpol
Federal Gaming Board FGB
Federal Institute for Comparative Law SICL
Federal Arbitration Commission for the Exploitation of Copyrights and Related Rights
National Commission for the Prevention of Torture NCPT

DDPS
Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport
Ueli Maurer
Head of Department

General Secretariat GS-DDPS
Office of the Armed Forces Attorney General
Defence
Civil Protection
Sport
Armasuisse
Federal Intelligence Service
Federal Office of Topography* swisstopo

FDI
Federal Department of Integration

FDWA
Federal Department of Work and Agriculture

FDFA
Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

FDHA
Federal Department of Home Affairs

FDJP
Federal Department of Justice and Police

* Subject to the corresponding Federal Council decision of spring 2015
Staff: No. of full-time positions, average for 2013, rounded
Expenses/Revenue: state financial statement 2013, figures rounded

Organisational units in grey are mostly independent. Budget and staff information is therefore not included in the respective department figures.
The Federal Chancellery is headed by Federal Chancellor Corina Casanova, who is elected by parliament in the same way as the members of the Federal Council. She has a say in government affairs and can submit proposals on matters relating to her field of business. The Federal Chancellor is supported in her work by vice chancellors André Simonazzi and Thomas Helbling, and about 270 employees.

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

**Vote électronique: a joint project**
For now, most Swiss people have two ways of casting their vote: they can either send it by post or drop it in the letterbox of the commune or in the ballot box in their commune. In future, people will also be able to vote electronically. The Federal Chancellery is working closely with the cantons to implement the ‘Vote électronique’ project. ‘Security before speed’ is the motto when it comes to introducing this new voting channel. Half of the cantons have participated in e-voting trials since 2010. An average of around 160,000 voters, primarily Swiss people living abroad, can now vote electronically. This target group will also be able to vote online in the 2015 National Council elections. In the next phase of the project, pilot projects will be extended to eligible voters residing in Switzerland.

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

**Planning for the Federal Council**
The Federal Council deals with between 2000 and 2500 items of government business every year, which are brought together in a four-year legislature plan which serves as a basis for defining the annual objectives. In its annual report, the Federal Council reports to parliament on whether it has achieved those objectives. The planning process is conducted by the Federal Chancellery together with the departments. The Federal Chancellery also coordinates long-term planning. The challenges facing Switzerland in the years to come are outlined in the Outlook 2030 report.

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

Vice Chancellor Thomas Helbling in turn ensures that all seven departments are informed in detail and in writing about the Federal Council decisions. The Federal Council decisions and reports are published in the Federal Gazette in the three official languages. The new or amended acts and ordinances are published weekly in the Official Compilation of Federal Legislation. The Classified Compilation of Federal Legislation is continuously updated. It provides a complete overview of current law, and is an essential tool for both lawyers and many private individuals.
Support for the President of the Swiss Confederation
When a federal councillor is elected President of the Swiss Confederation, they and the department they head assume a number of additional tasks. The Federal Chancellery supports the president with a special range of services, some of which are provided by the Presidential Affairs Unit established in 2015. The unit’s core task is to provide foreign policy advice, but it also supports the president in a broad range of communication tasks which arise during the year in office.

Texts in German, French and Italian
In a multilingual country such as Switzerland all laws and important parliamentary, government and administrative texts have to be made available in the three official languages. The Central Language Services at the Federal Chancellery ensure that laws, ordinances and treaties are formulated as clearly as possible in German, French and Italian. Many federal government and administrative texts are also translated into Romansh and English.

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

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

Collaborative tool for the Federal Chancellery
All employees of the Federal Chancellery work with an electronic records and process management system, which makes it easier for teams to work together; important documents are also archived automatically. The system also allows recurring procedures to be initiated and executed according to predefined processes.

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

Ensuring transparency and protecting privacy
The Data Protection Act (DPA) is designed to protect the privacy and fundamental rights of persons whose data is processed. The Federal Data Protection and Information Commissioner (FDPIC) ensures compliance with this law and advises citizens in matters relating to data protection. His second area of responsibility involves the Federal Act on Freedom of Information, which affords access to official documents. If a federal office concerned refuses to give a person access to such information, the FDPIC can be called upon to mediate.
An earthquake in a remote village in Morocco has caused huge devastation: whole houses have collapsed, people and animals are buried under rubble. The injured need to be rescued as soon as possible. Fortunately, this is just an exercise being played out in realistically staged ruins in Epeisses near Geneva. A team from the Moroccan civil defence service has arrived with 30 tons of equipment and eleven search and rescue dogs to train here for all eventualities. Since 2007, Swiss experts under the guidance of the FDFA have been supporting the Moroccan rescue services. On the right, holding a phone and wearing a white protective helmet, is Susanna Graf of the FDFA’s Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) – one of the organisers of the large-scale exercise. Transfer of expertise is one of the main aspects of Swiss development work, true to the motto of helping people to help themselves.
The FDFA safeguards Swiss interests abroad and implements the foreign policy adopted by the Federal Council. For the period 2012–2015, the Federal Council is placing particular emphasis on fostering and expanding relations with neighbouring countries and with the European Union as a whole. Switzerland also wants to step up its efforts to promote stability in Europe and neighbouring regions and to foster a range of strategic partnerships and its involvement in the global arena.

The FDFA uses modern technologies to continuously update and improve its services for Swiss nationals abroad.

**General Secretariat** GS-FDFA

As staff unit of the head of department, the General Secretariat coordinates business for parliament and the Federal Council and is responsible for internal and external communication. It is responsible for the promotion of gender equality within the FDFA. Financial monitoring and supervising management of diplomatic and consular activities at Switzerland’s representations abroad also form part of its tasks. Presence Switzerland, a unit which promotes a positive image of Switzerland abroad, is subordinate to the General Secretariat. It organises events in conjunction with the Swiss representations and arrangements visits by foreign delegations to Switzerland. It is responsible for the House of Switzerland at international sports events and for Switzerland’s presence at international exhibitions: most recently, the Swiss pavilion at the 2015 World Expo in Milan. Presence Switzerland runs the www.houseofswitzerland.org and www.swissworld.org portals and is active in social media. The Historical Service of the FDFA also falls under the General Secretariat. Its activities include recording the historical aspects of Swiss foreign policy.

**State Secretariat**

The State Secretariat supports the head of department in the development and planning of foreign policy. The State Secretary is able to represent the head of department both within the government and externally. Responsibilities include maintaining, coordinating and developing Switzerland’s bilateral relations with other states and the EU, cooperating with international organisations such as the United Nations, and Swiss security, peace and disarmament policy. He is supported in this role by the Directorate of Political Affairs, which he heads as Director. Reporting directly to the State Secretary is the Crisis Management Centre, which publishes travel advice with assessments of the security situation abroad and issues information about the most important developments via Twitter. The Centre coordinates government measures to protect Swiss nationals in cases of armed conflict, political unrest, major accidents, natural disasters, attempts on their lives, and kidnappings abroad. The Protocol section is also attached to the State Secretariat. It coordinates ceremonial matters and protocol, and is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Protocol Rules of the Swiss Confederation.

**Directorate of Political Affairs** DP

Evaluating global challenges, developing strategies, and identifying emerging tensions and trouble-spots – the Directorate of Political Affairs is where all of the information comes together to enable Switzerland to safeguard its interests abroad. The Directorate of Political Affairs, headed by the State Secretary, handles day-to-day foreign policy business and is the body to which the representations abroad report. Five geographical divisions are responsible for bilateral relations with the states in their individual regions, and for coordination with the Federal Administration. A further division implements policy in the United Nations and other international organisations, and is responsible for Switzerland’s policy as the host country to these organisations.

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

**Directorate of European Affairs** DEA

The Directorate of European Affairs DEA is the Swiss government’s centre of expertise for all issues relating to European integration. The DEA tracks the political and economic aspects of European integration, coordinates Switzerland’s policy on Europe, and provides information on this area. It prepares decisions and leads negotiations with the EU in collaboration with the specialist offices. At the same time it also observes and analyses developments in the EU and in European law, and their consequences for Switzerland.
Directorate of Public International Law DIL

Director: Valentin Zellweger

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

Consular Directorate CD

Director: Jürg Burri

The Consular Directorate CD is the central point of contact for Swiss nationals abroad and ensures an optimum level of public service. It supports the representations abroad in their provision of reliable and efficient consular services, providing the tools that are required for the job and coordinating and optimising cooperation with national and international partners, in particular with regard to visas.

When Swiss nationals abroad find themselves in difficulty and need help, the CD coordinates between the representations abroad, the relevant organisations and authorities and family members in Switzerland. The FDFA Helpline (+41 800 24 7 365) acts as central point of contact and handles enquiries round the clock. Travellers can register on the itineris online platform so that they can be contacted quickly in case of an emergency. The itineris app provides information on the security situation in various travel destinations and the nearest Swiss representation (www.fdfa.admin.ch/traveladvice).

In addition, the CD is responsible for institutional relations with Swiss nationals abroad. It answers questions relating to emigration and living abroad on its www.swissemigration.ch website.

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC

Director General: Manuel Sager

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC implements the Federal Council’s foreign policy strategy in the areas of humanitarian aid, development cooperation in the south and transitional aid in Eastern Europe. The SDC supports the victims of crises and armed conflicts, and with the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit SHA provides emergency and reconstruction aid following natural disasters and armed conflicts. It cooperates multilaterally in global programmes.

Working alongside the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO, the SDC also administers what is known as the ‘enlargement contribution’ in new EU member states. It has a mandate from the Federal Council and parliament to support political and economic reform in Eastern Europe.

The SDC provides regular updates on its work and deployments to emergency situations and disaster areas on its website, in a newsletter, in its ‘One World’ magazine and via social media.

Directorate for Resources DR

Director: Helene Budliger Artieda

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

The department’s Legal Service also forms part of the DR, as does the Swiss Government Travel Centre, which is responsible for organising international business travel for the whole of the Federal Administration.

Swiss representations abroad

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

Fair pay makes sense

On average, women in Switzerland earn a fifth less than their male colleagues, even though the Federal Constitution states that men and women have the right to equal pay for work of equal value. There is no coherent reason for a significant part of this difference. The Federal Office for Gender Equality (FOGE) seeks to improve the pay situation by seeking to raise awareness and by providing advice. Businesses are increasingly recognising that equal pay has become an important success factor on the labour market. Firms which can demonstrate that they treat men and women on their payroll equally are more appealing to highly qualified applicants. The FOGE provides firms with tools so that they can check their pay practices. The photo shows Patric Aeberhard from the FOGE talking with the head of human resources at a metal working company. He concludes that the company is on the right track.

Patric Aeberhard (in the fluorescent jacket on the left) works for the Federal Office for Gender Equality (FOGE) and is one of about 2600 federal employees at the Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA).
The General Secretariat is responsible for planning, coordination and controlling; it acts as a hub between the federal offices and the head of department and provides advisory services for the entire department. The Federal Supervisory Board for 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.

The FOGE is responsible for legal and de facto gender equality. It is particularly active in the areas of equal pay, work-life balance and in the prevention of and the fight against domestic violence. It supports advice centres and projects to promote equal opportunities in the labour market. The Secretariat of the Federal Commission for Women’s Issues is affiliated to this office.

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

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

The SFA evaluates, safeguards, catalogues and raises public awareness of Confederation documents with archival value. The full inventory extends over 50 kilometres and 16 terabytes and includes original documents such as the Federal Constitution, deeds, photos, films, recordings and databases. In a democratic constitutional state, the archiving of such records is essential for continuity and transparency and it enables citizens to exercise democratic control over government and administrative activities and provides a basis for research.

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

The FOPH and the cantons are jointly responsible for public health and for developing a national health policy. This includes the upkeep and development of health and accident insurance. The FOPH draws up legal requirements for consumers and ensures that these laws are observed. It is responsible for monitoring contagious diseases and for protecting the population against radiation. The FOPH is responsible for national programmes and awareness campaigns to promote healthy living. It regulates academic and postgraduate training for medical professionals and awards federal diplomas in these areas. The office is also in charge of legislation for and the monitoring of biological security, research on humans and transplantation medicine. The FOPH is working with partners on behalf of the Federal Council to implement the ‘Health 2020’ strategy in order to optimally adapt the Swiss healthcare system to future challenges. The FOPH represents Switzerland’s interests in the field of health in international organisations and towards other countries.
Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office FSVO

The FSVO is the federal competence centre for food safety, nutrition, animal health and animal welfare. It prepares the necessary legislation, and supports the consistent implementation of the law in the cantons. It supervises imports of animals and animal products, and acts as the enforcement authority for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The FSVO takes decisions to protect the Swiss population from foodstuffs and utility articles which could pose a risk to health or mislead consumers. It also conducts applied research and supports research projects in its area of activity. It is responsible for identifying and assessing health risks to humans and animals. The Institute of Virology and Immunology (IVI) is affiliated to the FSVO. The IVI is the Swiss reference laboratory for the diagnosis, monitoring and control of highly infectious animal diseases and accreditation body for vaccines and sera for animals.

Federal Statistical Office FSO

Through transparency, statistics help create a common basis for social and political discourse. As part of its mandate, the FSO takes account of the priority policy areas and illustrates the nation’s collective memory in the form of the developments of society in the economy, the population, health, spatial planning and the environment. As the national competence centre for public statistics, the FSO fosters national and international comparability. It guarantees public access to reliable data.

Federal Social Insurance Office FSIO

Switzerland has an effective and solid social insurance system. This needs to be maintained in the future, even under difficult economic conditions, since it is an important element in upholding peace. The FSIO is responsible for Old Age and Survivors’ Insurance (OASI), Invalidity Insurance (IV), supplementary benefits, occupational pension funds, compensation for loss of earnings for people doing military service and women on maternity leave, and family allowances. It ensures that these elements of the social insurance system within its remit are properly administered and adapted in line with new challenges, such as the current reform project ‘Retirement provision 2020’. In addition, it is responsible for dealing with issues relating to family, children, youth and old-age, generational relationships and for general socio-political issues. The FSIO oversees the work of the implementing bodies and, in some areas, such as start-up funding for child day-care services, is itself the implementing body.

Swiss Agency for Therapeutic Products Swissmedic

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

Swiss National Museum SNM

Three museums – the National Museum in Zurich, the Château de Prangins and the Forum of Swiss History in Schwyz, as well as the collections centre in Affoltern am Albis – are united under the umbrella of the Swiss National Museum (SNM). The permanent exhibitions at the museums present Swiss cultural history from its beginnings to the present, and give an insight into Swiss identity and the rich tapestry of our country’s history and culture. Temporary exhibitions also provide a link to the current topics of interest from a societal, social, economic or historical perspective. With more than 840,000 items, the SNM has the largest collection of items documenting the culture and handicrafts of Switzerland.

Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia

Pro Helvetia promotes artistic activity in Switzerland, promotes Swiss art and culture abroad, encourages cultural exchange and helps make the arts more accessible to the public. It focuses on promoting projects which are of national and international importance, and young artists. Pro Helvetia is a public foundation. It complements support for the arts at cantonal and local level. It makes funding decisions independently.
Taking care of parks in Chiasso

Once a week a team in overalls arrives at this park above Chiasso: they empty the bins at the picnic spot, cut the grass and collect the rubbish. The five Eritrean asylum seekers from the federally run centre in Chiasso are working here voluntarily. They are accompanied by Jimmy Ferro from the State Secretariat for Migration SEM. The reception and processing centre in Chiasso was the first to allow asylum seekers to perform voluntary work as part of a pilot project. Now such schemes are set out in law and offered by all reception and processing centres. The concept has proven to be a success: the local council says what needs doing and pays a part of the costs. The reception and processing centre then ensures that the work is done. For the asylum seekers the work adds structure to their day and allows them to do something worthwhile. The local communities around Chiasso also benefit as the asylum seekers perform the equivalent of around 5000 working days a year.

Jimmy Ferro works at the Chiasso reception and processing centre of the State Secretariat for Migration SEM and is one of around 3100 federal employees at the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP).
The General Secretariat supports and advises the head of department in her daily work and ensures that the different sections of the department cooperate smoothly. It coordinates business for parliament and the Federal Council; it informs the public of the FDJP’s activities and manages human resources and finances for the whole department. The Information Technology Service Centre ISC-FDJP also forms part of the FDJP. It develops and manages IT applications, such as search systems or the register of criminal records, for the justice, police and migration authorities throughout Switzerland. Post and telecommunications surveillance services also come under the administration of the ISC-FDJP.

State Secretariat for Migration SEM

Migration has been an aspect of human life since time immemorial – over the centuries people have always crossed borders when political, social or economic circumstances have made it necessary. People come to Switzerland in search of work, training, protection or for the sake of family or love. The State Secretariat for Migration SEM decides under what conditions a person can enter Switzerland and live and work in the country. It also decides who will be given protection from persecution in Switzerland. In conjunction with the cantons it organises accommodation for asylum seekers and the repatriation of those who do not need Switzerland’s protection. The SEM also coordinates federal, cantonal and communal integration measures and is responsible for naturalisation at federal level. Swiss immigration policy is currently focussing on developing a new model for immigration and restructuring the asylum system.

Federal Office of Justice FOJ

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

Federal Office of Police fedpol

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

Federal Gaming Board FGB

The FGB is the supervisory authority for the 21 casinos in Switzerland. It ensures that casinos offer all their patrons a fair and enjoyable game. It also ensures that casinos fulfil their duty of care and comply with legal provisions to fight money laundering and to prevent compulsive gambling. It investigates illegal gambling activities which do not fall under the Lotteries Act (and are therefore the responsibility of the cantons). The FGB levies the gaming tax and channels the majority of the revenue into the Old Age and Survivors compensation fund.
other countries, other customs is a German saying which is particularly pertinent in Switzerland, a small nation with a wide network of relations with foreign countries. ‘Other customs’, i.e. foreign law, can be of relevance in mixed nationality families or economic relations. But how does one find out about a certain law in Kazakhstan or a judicial decision in Mongolia? The Swiss Institute for Comparative Law SICL provides information on foreign legal systems to the courts, authorities and lawyers. In order for Switzerland to benefit from experience gained in other countries, the SICL also conducts studies in comparative law during legislative projects.

Federal Arbitration Commission for the Exploitation of Copyrights and Related Rights

President: Armin Knecht

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

National Commission for the Prevention of Torture NCPT

President: Jean-Pierre Restellini

Switzerland has ratified the UN’s Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. By making regular visits to penal institutions, the 12-person Commission helps to prevent the practice of torture and inhumane or humiliating treatment. It also ensures that the fundamental rights of persons who are forcibly repatriated by air are observed.

Federal Commission on Migration FCM

President: Walter Leimgruber

As an extra-parliamentary commission, the FCM advises the Federal Council and the federal administration on migration issues, draws up advisory opinions and recommendations and publishes reports. The Commission is made up of 30 members, around half of whom have personal experience of migration.
The whole world at a glance

The situation in Switzerland is comparatively quiet and stable. That is the conclusion of the Federal Intelligence Service’s (FIS) 2014 situation report. However, the FIS must permanently keep abreast of international developments and assess their impact on Switzerland; in order to be able to respond appropriately, the federal government and the Swiss authorities rely on the fact that potential threats and risks will be identified in good time. That is the task of the Situation Centre. Its head, Martin Schütz, is standing in the doorway of his office. This is where all the threads come together. On large screens, the centre’s staff monitor international media sources and process additional information procured using intelligence methods. Once compiled and condensed, this gives a continually updated picture of the security situation in Switzerland, which helps to keep our country on track.

Martin Schütz is head of the Situation Centre at the Federal Intelligence Service and one of 12,200 federal employees at the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS).
The P in DDPS stands for civil protection. Civil protection is an integrated system to provide crisis management, protection, rescue and assistance. In the event of disasters and emergencies it ensures the cooperation of the five partner organisations: the police and fire services, the health service, technical operations and civil defence. A joint management body is responsible for coordinating and managing operations.

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

Within the FOCP there are two services with special tasks. The National Emergency Operations Centre in Zurich is responsible for warning and alerting the authorities and emergency services. In the event of incidents involving elevated levels of radioactivity, it warns the general public and, if necessary, orders protection measures to be applied. The National Emergency Operations Centre is a key element in the work of the National Crisis Management Board and provides the latter with the information it needs to form its decisions. The Spiez Laboratory is Switzerland’s institute for NBC protection. Its services are often called on by the UN and other international organisations.

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

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

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

The Commanders of the Land Forces and the Air Force, also lieutenant generals, bear overall responsibility for training the Land Forces and the Air Force and for preparing ground and air units for action.
Civil Protection and Sport
Federal Department of Defence,
www.baspo.ch
www.swisstopo.ch
www.armasuisse.ch
www.ndb.admin.ch

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

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

armasuisse
Chief of Defence Procurement: www.armasuisse.ch

armasuisse is the DDPS competence centre for procurement, technology and real estate. It ensures that the armed forces, other federal offices and third parties are supplied with the systems, vehicles, equipment and properties that they require. armasuisse is one of four federal government procurement centres. The organisation’s civilian employees procure everything from chocolate to multi-purpose helicopters and tankers. They are also responsible for planning, supervising and managing a wide variety of real estate projects.

armasuisse covers the following areas of competence: command and reconnaissance systems (e.g. procurement of radio and communication technology), land systems (e.g. procurement of vehicles, arms and ammunition), air systems (e.g. procurement of planes and helicopters), purchasing and cooperation (e.g. procurement of personal equipment), science and technology (e.g. procurement of sensor technology and munition control), resources and support (e.g. finances, enterprise development) and real estate (sustainable management of approx. 14,000 properties, sites and 24,000 hectares of land belonging to the DDPS). As armasuisse is responsible for arms, equipment and real estate during their entire life cycle, it is also responsible for their liquidation at the end of their useful life.

Federal Intelligence Service FIS
Director: Markus Seiler
www.ndb.admin.ch

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

Federal Office of Topography* swisstopo
Director: Fridolin Wicki
www.swisstopo.ch

As Switzerland’s geoinformation centre, the Federal Office of Topography (swisstopo) is responsible for ‘measuring’ Switzerland. It gathers and manages geodata and makes it available to a variety of audiences. swisstopo conducts surveys of Switzerland and documents landscapes both above and below ground. Thanks to their quality and precision, swisstopo’s maps are held in high regard both at home and abroad. Further important products include topographical and landscape models, aerial photos, ortho-images, geological data and online maps and applications for computers, tablets and smartphones, first and foremost the federal government’s geoportal, map.geo.admin.ch.

The legal basis for its work is provided by the Geoinformation Act. In addition to its core products swisstopo coordinates geoinformation and geology activities at federal level and runs the Institute for Military Geography. swisstopo is the supervisory body for official cadastral surveying and the cadastre of public law restrictions on land ownership (PLR Cadastre) and coordinates the harmonisation of Swiss geodata in cooperation with the cantons, the communities and the private sector.

* Subject to the corresponding Federal Council decision of spring 2015
Nicoletta Mariolini, from Ticino, stands on the banks of the Sarine in Fribourg. The river marks the border between German- and French-speaking Switzerland. The two sides have been linked for many centuries by the ‘Bernbrücke’, a bridge which could be seen to symbolise Nicoletta’s work. Her job as federal delegate for multilingualism is to promote understanding among the language groups. The law states that any citizen can communicate with the federal authorities and receive a reply in one of the national languages, German, French, Italian or Romansh. This means that federal employees should ideally master several languages. For this reason, the Federal Council revised the Languages Ordinance in 2014 with the aim of increasing the representation of minority languages in the federal administration and of encouraging federal employees to improve their language skills by providing easier access to language courses.

Nicoletta Mariolini is the federal delegate for multilingualism and one of around 9200 federal employees at the Federal Department of Finance (FDF).
Federal Department of Finance (FDF)

General Secretariat (GS-FDF)

Secretary General: Jörg Gasser

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

State Secretariat for International Financial Matters (SIF)

State Secretary: Jacques de Watteville

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

Federal Tax Administration (FTA)

Director: Adrian Hug

The FTA will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2015. The FTA raises a major part of the Confederation’s receipts and ensures that the Confederation can fulfil its public duties. It is responsible for VAT, direct federal tax, withholding tax and stamp duty. The FTA also provides international administrative assistance in tax matters. Within Switzerland, it prepares legislative amendments to tax law and contributes to a healthy tax environment. In performing its tasks for taxpayers and the cantonal tax authorities, it is committed to efficiency, expertise and partnership.

Federal Customs Administration (FCA)

Director: Rudolf Dietrich

The FCA controls who and what enters Switzerland at and behind the country’s borders. The Border Guard (BG) is the uniformed and armed section of the FCA and is the largest national civilian security organisation. Aside from carrying out customs tasks, the BG’s tasks include tracing persons, vehicles and stolen property. It fights cross-border crime, professional smuggling and illegal migration.

The customs branch of the FCA is responsible for merchandise. In addition to collecting taxes, it is also concerned with protecting public health by inspecting goods and foodstuffs. It is also responsible for protecting endangered species and cultural goods along with many other tasks, including aspects relating to free trade agreements.

The FFD produces the country’s coinage.

Federal Office of Personnel (FOPER)

Director: Barbara Schaerer

Around 38,000 people work in the Federal Administration, which offers interesting and innovative working conditions. As an attractive employer, the Federal Administration contributes to the country’s strong standing in the international competition among locations for work. FOPER ensures that the Federal Administration remains a competitive employer and can continue to attract and retain the best people for the job.

Do not spend more than you earn': in 2001 the electorate signalled to the Federal Council and parliament that they should not run up any further debt. The debt brake therefore requires expenditure to rise at a lower rate than receipts over the economic cycle. 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 players sufficient time to make the appropriate changes and decide whether projects need to be halted, or if new sources of revenue need to be sought. The FFA’s transparent accounting ensures that parliament and the people can see how their taxes are being spent. The FFA also oversees the legal framework of the monetary system. Attached to the FFA are the Central Compensation Office (CCO) and Swissmint, the federal mint. The CCO is the executive body of
Federal Office of Information Technology, Systems and Telecommunication  
**FOITT**

**Director:** Giovanni Conti  
**www.bit.admin.ch**

People increasingly expect to be able to contact the administration via computer or the internet when they need to order a new passport or file tax returns. The FOITT plays a major role in providing an electronic link between the Confederation and the public, whether in terms of access to information and services via the internet, or linking checkpoints at airports and borders with administrative units in Bern. The FOITT provides the federal offices with modern, uniform workplace systems and enables efficient access to the central information repositories and applications.

Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics **FOBL**

**Director:** Gustave E. Marchand  
**www.bbl.admin.ch**

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

Federal IT Steering Unit **FITSU**

**Delegate:** Peter Fischer  
**www.isb.admin.ch**

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

Swiss Federal Audit Office **SFAO**

**Director:** Michel Huissoud  
**www.efh.admin.ch**

The SFAO is the Confederation’s supreme audit institution. It is an independent institution and supports the Federal Assembly and the Federal Council in the oversight of the Federal Administration and the federal courts. The SFAO’s audits help ensure the orderly, legal and efficient operation of the administration and the courts.

Swiss Alcohol Board **SAB**

**Director:** Fritz Etter  
**www.eav.admin.ch**

The SAB regulates the spirits market by means of taxes and restrictions on trading and advertising. Alcosuisse, the SAB’s profit centre, supplies ethanol to the Swiss economy. As part of the total revision of the Alcohol Act, the ethanol and spirits market is to be liberalised and the taxation and monitoring system will be revised. The aim is to create a coherent alcohol policy under which uniform provisions exist for the trade in all alcoholic beverages, particularly taking into account the protection of minors.

Federal Pension Fund **PUBLICA**

**Director:** Dieter Stohler  
**www.publica.ch**

Together with the old age and survivors’ insurance, the occupational pension (pension fund) should allow people to maintain their accustomed standard of living once they retire. As a non-profit collective occupational pension, PUBLICA manages assets totalling around CHF 37 billion exclusively in the interests of its policyholders (currently 62,000) and pension recipients (currently 43,000). PUBLICA is one of the largest pension funds in Switzerland; it currently has 21 affiliated pension schemes with around 80 employer institutions. PUBLICA’s investment strategy is committed to one hundred per cent cost transparency.
People in Switzerland are living ever longer. Predictions show that by 2020, one in five people will be over the age of 65. In order to meet this challenge there is a need for suitable housing: people should be able to live in familiar surroundings, receive additional care in suitably adapted accommodation, free of obstacles such as stairs and sills, and at an affordable price. This is where the Federal Office for Housing (FOH) comes in. It supports public utility housing projects by providing advice and financial assistance. In the picture, Felix Walder from the FOH is sitting with a retired couple and the president of the Kriechenwil (BE) retirement home cooperative, which benefitted from FOH support.

Felix Walder (on the right) is Deputy Director of the Federal Office for Housing (FOH) and one of 2400 federal employees at the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER).
## Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER)

### General Secretariat (GS-EAER)

**Secretary General:** Stefan Brupbacher  
[www.wbf.admin.ch](http://www.wbf.admin.ch)

The General Secretariat is the staff and coordination office of the department and supports and advises the head of department in his daily work. Its brief 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, finance and logistics, IT and accounting and translation services for the whole department. For administrative purposes the Federal Consumer Affairs Bureau FCAB and the Central Office for Civilian Service ZIVI report to the General Secretariat. The FCAB is the federal government’s central office for economic policy related concerns on the part of consumers. It is also responsible for ensuring the declaration of origin of wood and wood products and together with SECO runs a product safety information and reporting office. In Switzerland, young men who object to doing military service on grounds of conscience may perform civilian service instead. ZIVI, which has regional centres in six locations throughout Switzerland, ensures that there are enough civilian service positions available and prepares those performing civilian service for deployment at its training centre.

### State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI)

**State Secretary:** Mauro Dell’Ambrogio  
[www.sbf.admin.ch](http://www.sbf.admin.ch)

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

### Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG)

**Director:** Bernard Lehmann  
[www.blw.admin.ch](http://www.blw.admin.ch)

Switzerland has 1,049,924 hectares of farmland, 1,557,474 head of cattle in its pastures and 158,919 people employed in the agricultural sector. Each year, the federal government provides agriculture with financial support of around CHF 3.7 billion. The FOAG works to ensure that the country’s farmers produce high quality foodstuffs in a way that is both sustainable and market-oriented. Its aim is to have a multifunctional farming system that contributes to meeting the food needs of the population, maintaining the basic necessities of life, as well as the settlement of rural areas. A socially acceptable balance must be sought between developments in domestic policy and the need to respond to changing external factors. The FOAG deals with the development of rural areas and promotes agricultural research at its Agroscope research stations.

### Federal Office for National Economic Supply (FONES)

**Delegate:** Gisèle Girgis-Musy  
[www.bwl.admin.ch](http://www.bwl.admin.ch)

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

**Federal Office for Housing** **FOH**

Director: **Ernst Hauri**

www.bwo.admin.ch

Housing is a basic need, but houses and apartments are also important economic assets. Each year around CHF 29 billion is invested in housing construction. Living costs are the greatest items of expenditure for households. Tenants pay some CHF 33 billion a year in rent and around CHF 19 billion is paid by homeowners to creditors in mortgage interest payments. The FOH 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 FOH also seeks to reconcile the interests of landlords and tenants in the area of tenancy law.

**Office of the Price Supervisor**

Price supervisor: **Stefan Meierhans**

www.preisueberwacher.admin.ch

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

**Commission for Technology and Innovation** **CTI**

Director: **Andreas Reuter-Hofer**

www.kti.admin.ch

Innovation is key to Switzerland’s economic prosperity. The Commission for Technology and Innovation CTI plays a central role in the state’s innovation promotion activities. It is active in areas where private sector initiatives can be strengthened by state support. The CTI funds joint research projects between companies and higher education institutions, supporting knowledge and technology transfer and the creation and development of science-based companies. It does this via its national thematic networks, locally active innovation mentors and platforms. The CTI is an independent executive commission and also comprises start-up coaches, innovation mentors and a secretariat.

**Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training** **SFIVET**

Director: **Cornelia Oertle**

www.ethb-schweiz.ch

SFIVET is the national vocational education and training think-tank: the Swiss Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training SFIVET, which has offices in Lausanne, Lugano, Zollikofen und Zurich, is the federal centre of expertise for initial and continuing education training of VET/PET professionals and for development and research in this field. It also trains VET/PET specialists in its Masters programme in vocational and professional education and training. SFIVET maintains a close-knit network with national and international partners.

**Federal Institutes of Technology Group** **ETH Domain**

President of the ETH Board: **Fritz Schlösser**

www.ethrat.ch

The ETH Domain strives for academic excellence through its 19,000-strong staff, more than 28,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students and about 800 professors. It enjoys a considerable standing both within Switzerland and abroad. The ETH Domain consists of the two Federal Institutes of Technology ETH Zurich (ETHZ) and EPF Lausanne (EPFL), and four further research institutes, the Paul Scherrer Institute (PSI), the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research (WSL), the Swiss Federal Laboratory for Materials Testing and Research (Empa) and the Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology (Eawag). The ETH Board is the strategic management and supervisory body of the ETH Domain. It supervises development plans, carries out control activities and ensures good coordination with its partners. It is an appointing authority and represents the ETH Domain in dealings with the authorities of the Confederation.

**Competiion Commission** **COMCO**

Director: **Rafael Corazza**

www.weko.admin.ch

Consumer goods in Switzerland are frequently more expensive than abroad, businesses often put pressure on their suppliers and there are regular mergers between companies. COMCO monitors such activities, 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.
Green slopes and a safe road

The main road over the Simplon Pass climbs up to 2000 metres above sea level. Here in the Alps it is not easy to guarantee the safety of the roads. On the Simplon, for example, there is a high risk of avalanche: the steep slope on the southwest side of the Glatthorn is directly above the road, making it particularly dangerous in winter and spring. Years ago avalanche barriers were built on the Glatthorn in various stages to protect the Simplon village bypass. As a result of erosion, the ground underneath the foundations of the steel structures has slowly slid away. This is where Philippe Arnold, a geologist at FEDRO (Federal Roads Office), stepped in. FEDRO and other experts came up with a way of stabilising the slope. They took 170,000 native plants and planted them in the critical zone around the Glatthorn. Nets were then laid to keep them in place. The success of the project has proven the specialists right: today, the Glatthorn is covered in a blanket of green, which strengthens the critical slope and so helps to keep the road safe.

Geologist Philippe Arnold is a natural hazards specialist at the Federal Roads Office FEDRO and is one of 2400 federal employees at the Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications (DETEC).
Federal Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications DETEC

**General Secretariat GS-DETEC**

**Director:** Walter Thurnherr  
**Secretary General:** Walter Thurnherr  
**www.uvek.admin.ch**

The overlapping nature of many items of business requires extensive coordination with DETEC offices and other departments. The GS takes on this task as the staff office for the department. The GS-DETEC also prepares items of business for the Federal Council, supports political planning, acts as an intermediary between DETEC and parliament and ensures coherent external communication. It is also primarily responsible for the resources required within the department. In addition, it also acts as owner of Swiss Post, SBB, Swisscom and Skyguide and supervises the implementation of the strategic aims set out by the Federal Council.

The Independent Complaints Authority for Radio and Television, the Communications Commission (ComCom), the Swiss Accident Investigation Board SAIB, the Regulation Authority in the postal market (PostReg), the Federal Electricity Commission (ElCom), the Swiss Federal Nuclear Safety Inspectorate, the Federal Inspectorate for Heavy Current Installations, the Federal Pipelines Inspectorate and the Railways Arbitration Commission are all affiliated to the GS-DETEC for administrative purposes.

**Federal Office of the Environment SFOE**

**Director:** Walter Steinmann  
**www.bfe.admin.ch**

The Federal Council’s energy policy is oriented towards improving energy efficiency, promoting renewable energy sources, particularly hydropower, rapidly expanding the electricity grid, and on increasing energy research and international cooperation. The SFOE has the task of putting these energy policy principles into practice and draws up suitable frameworks and measures to achieve this, such as regulations on the energy consumption of household appliances, consumer electronics, light bulbs and electric motors. The aim is to ensure that our country will still have sufficient, safe, affordable and environmentally friendly energy supplies in the future.

**Federal Roads Office FEDRO**

**Director:** Jürg Rüthlisberger  
**www.astra.admin.ch**

The traffic on Swiss roads should flow smoothly. FEDRO is mandated by the Federal Council and parliament to solve the following problems: which sections of the national road network need to be extended? Which stretches need to be resurfaced? Which tunnels need to be brought in line with the latest safety standards? FEDRO implements the ‘Via sicura’ road safety programme adopted by parliament. The aim of the programme is to continue to reduce the number of people killed or injured in road accidents. Therefore only well-trained drivers with safe, efficient vehicles should be driving on safe roads. As such FEDRO sets the requirements that drivers of 40-tonne trucks need to fulfil to ensure they transport their cargo safely, or it adapts technical requirements affecting e-bikes, in order to promote this form of mobility.

**Federal Office of Civil Aviation FOCA**

**Director:** Peter Müller  
**www.aviation.admin.ch**

‘Safety first’ is the FOCA’s overriding principle. The FOCA uses a system of certifications and inspections to guarantee the implementation of high safety standards in Swiss aviation when measured against a European cross-section. In order to further improve air safety, the FOCA applies 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. This approach places greater emphasis on learning from incidents that compromise safety than on penalising those at fault. In addition, the FOCA seeks to strengthen safety culture in Swiss aviation through new instruments such as the introduction of safety management systems in companies.

**Swiss Federal Office of Energy SFOE**

**Director:** Walter Steinmann  
**www.bfe.admin.ch**

The Federal Council’s energy policy is oriented towards improving energy efficiency, promoting renewable energy sources, particularly hydropower, rapidly expanding the electricity grid, and on increasing energy research and international cooperation. The SFOE has the task of putting these energy policy principles into practice and draws up suitable frameworks and measures to achieve this, such as regulations on the energy consumption of household appliances, consumer electronics, light bulbs and electric motors. The aim is to ensure that our country will still have sufficient, safe, affordable and environmentally friendly energy supplies in the future.

The traffic on Swiss roads should flow smoothly. FEDRO is mandated by the Federal Council and parliament to solve the following problems: which sections of the national road network need to be extended? Which stretches need to be resurfaced? Which tunnels need to be brought in line with the latest safety standards? FEDRO implements the ‘Via sicura’ road safety programme adopted by parliament. The aim of the programme is to continue to reduce the number of people killed or injured in road accidents. Therefore only well-trained drivers with safe, efficient vehicles should be driving on safe roads. As such FEDRO sets the requirements that drivers of 40-tonne trucks need to fulfil to ensure they transport their cargo safely, or it adapts technical requirements affecting e-bikes, in order to promote this form of mobility.
Every day we read the paper, pick up the phone, write and send emails and text messages, surf online, listen to the radio and watch TV. In order to be able to use all these services, there has to be a stable and powerful communications infrastructure in place. OFCOM helps to ensure that the population and businesses in all parts of the country have access to adequate and competitive telecommunications services.

OFCOM makes it possible for radio and television users at local level to access regional stations and the SRG’s programmes at national level. It also distributes the revenues from television and radio licence fees fairly among all regions in Switzerland. In the postal sector, OFCOM makes sure that newspapers and magazines benefit from reduced postage rates. It also manages and allocates frequencies for radio stations, mobile and wireless devices to ensure interference-free communication.

OFCOM’s oversight responsibilities include consumer protection. It monitors compliance with statutory provisions for radio and television advertising, value-added services which are offered with 090x numbers and for use of frequencies.

We all want to live healthy safe lives. We also want to be able to enjoy the beautiful countryside, the flora and fauna. We naturally also expect a sound economy allowing us to lead comfortable lives.

But what does all that have to do with environment policy? A great deal. Habitats and ecosystems not only give us pleasure because of their diversity and beauty, but they also provide further benefits, such as filtering water, pollinating crop plants and regulating the climate. Furthermore, they provide us with food, commodities and other goods. One of the core tasks of the FOEN is the long-term preservation of this diversity of life or biodiversity. By helping to safeguard the sustainable use of water, soils and the air, it contributes to a healthy economy, especially in an Alpine country like Switzerland where nature itself can also be a threat. Flooding, rock slides or avalanches make that blatantly clear. The FOEN helps to ensure that the cantons, communes and the public are prepared for these things – be it in the shape of maps indicating the areas where natural hazards are most likely to be expected, of forests to protect roads and housing, or of restored watercourses to protect against flooding.

The Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE is committed to making sure Switzerland can continue to play on its strengths – with efficient urban and economic centres, a dense network of lively and attractive towns, a varied and well-preserved countryside, as well as sustainable farmland. A number of developments run in parallel: on the one hand, Switzerland should be able to respond to the increasing mobility demands of the population with a policy of sustainable development covering aspects from mobility management to the development of transport infrastructure. On the other hand, spatial planning also has to take into account the growing need for housing while looking to preserve natural landscapes and productive land. The spatial concept drawn up jointly by the Confederation, the cantons, cities and communes under ARE’s lead sets out the guidelines for future spatial development. Based on the new legislation, the Swiss spatial concept focuses on inward urban development in order to counter urban sprawl in Switzerland. In order to optimally coordinate the most important transport infrastructure with the location and development of settlements, ARE is overseeing the regional ‘Transport and Settlement’ agglomeration programmes, co-financed by the federal government. It is involved in work on the Second Homes Act.

The Swiss Federal Nuclear Safety Inspectorate ENSI is responsible for ensuring the safe operation of nuclear installations in Switzerland. It is an independent public body and reports directly to the Federal Council. ENSI took over from the Federal Nuclear Safety Inspectorate HSK, which used to be part of the Federal Office of Energy. The overriding aim of the federal government’s supervisory activities in the field of nuclear energy is to protect the population and environment from harm resulting from radioactivity. ENSI therefore supervises Switzerland’s five nuclear power stations, the interim storage sites for radioactive waste and the nuclear research units at the Paul Scherrer Institute, Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne and the University of Basel. This involves ensuring that operators comply with regulations, facilities are in a safe condition and operated according to regulations and there is sufficient protection against radioactivity. ENSI is also responsible for the safe transport of radioactive material to and from Swiss nuclear facilities and for research into the storage of radioactive waste in deep geological repositories.
Each day, new cases land on the desks of federal judges in Lausanne or Lucerne. Here, it is Gilbert Kolly, President of the Federal Supreme Court, who receives the case file from a court usher. In addition to his managerial and representation duties as head of Switzerland’s highest court, Gilbert Kolly also serves as a federal judge for cases submitted to the First Civil Law Division. The case that has just come in is a damages claim against a firm of architects. After unsuccessfully pleading his case before the lower and higher cantonal courts, the building contractor has now taken his claim to the Federal Supreme Court. In most cases, decisions are taken by way of a circular: the lead judge drafts a decision, which is then circulated to the other judges examining the case. If they all agree, then the decision stands. If they do not agree, a public hearing is held to decide the matter. These hearings can be attended by the parties concerned as well as by members of the public. Following the discussion, the judges will then reach a decision by a show of hands.
The Federal Supreme Court is the highest judicial authority in Switzerland. It has the final say in nearly all civil, criminal, administrative and social insurance matters. Through its decisions, the Federal Supreme Court ensures the uniform application of federal law in Switzerland’s 26 cantons and contributes to the development of law. The Federal Supreme Court serves as the court of appeal for the highest cantonal courts and the three federal courts of first instance: the Federal Criminal Court, the Federal Administrative Court and the Federal Patent Court.

Interview with Gilbert Kolly, President of the Federal Supreme Court

Mr Kolly, what are your main duties?
As the president, I head the whole court and am also the public face of the court. I represent its interests and those of the federal court system before the Federal Assembly in Bern and in the parliamentary committees. I also represent the court in various national and international court organisations. Besides my duties as president, which take up about half of my working time, I also sit as a judge in the First Civil Law Division.

How does one become a federal judge?
In principle, this office is open to all Swiss citizens who have the right to vote. While there is no compulsory training for judges, all federal judges are in fact experienced lawyers who have undergone extensive legal training and have had long professional careers. In general, they have all been cantonal judges, judges in the lower federal courts, legal professors, solicitors or high-ranking officials. The United Federal Assembly selects federal judges in a way that ensures equitable representation of language groups, regions and political parties. Each judge is appointed for a six-year term. In most cases, federal judges may be re-elected an unlimited number of times. At the end of the year in which they turn 68, they must step down.

The Federal Supreme Court is the highest court in Switzerland.
What does this mean exactly?
The Federal Supreme Court has the final say on appeals against judgments rendered in the highest cantonal courts and in the federal courts of first instance. This enables remedy in the event of incorrect application of the law or violations of constitutional rights. In other words, the Federal Supreme Court issues the final ruling for nearly all important legal matters. Its decisions ensure that federal law is applied uniformly and is developed further. Federal Supreme Court rulings provide a basis upon which the other courts can make their decisions.

How important are Federal Supreme Court rulings?
Federal Supreme Court rulings determine how acts and ordinances are interpreted, or how new situations that are not yet covered by the law are to be assessed. The other courts tend to follow these rulings. Federal Supreme Court rulings may also trigger political debates and lead to parliament enacting new legislation. In 2011, for example, the Criminal Law Division handled a case where a woman had boarded a bus without a valid ticket. The Criminal Law Division noted that the Passenger Transport Act in force at the time did not authorise criminal proceedings to be taken against persons travelling without a ticket. However, the transport companies needed to be able to take such action in cases where a person failed to pay the fine or repeatedly travelled without a ticket. This Federal Supreme Court ruling led to the revision of the law in question so that unreasonable fare dodgers can also be subject to criminal prosecution.

What happens when a case comes before Switzerland’s highest judicial authority?
The first step is for an appeal to be lodged, but not necessarily by a lawyer. Then the opposing party is invited to respond. In most cases, rulings are passed by way of circular; one judge proposes a draft ruling, which is circulated to his or her colleagues within the same division. If they all agree, then the case is settled in accordance with the draft ruling. If one of the judges involved disagrees, then all of the judges will meet in a public hearing to discuss the matter. The dates of these public hearings are posted on the website of the Federal Supreme Court (www.bger.ch). The parties in the dispute and members of the public can attend these public hearings. The draft ruling and any counter proposals are first read out so that discussion can take place. The judges then give their opinion, each speaking in their own language. Following discussion (in some cases lasting several hours), the judges will then reach a decision based on a show of hands. In other words, hearings within the Federal Supreme Court do not involve scenes with plaintiffs and defendants giving testimony and lawyers pleading their case.
Presidency of the Federal Supreme Court

The Federal Assembly appoints the President and Vice President of the Federal Supreme Court from among its judges. The appointment is for two years, and can be renewed once. The President is head of the whole court and is also the public face of the court. His deputy is the Vice President or, if the latter is unable to fulfil this duty, the longest-serving judge. If two judges have served for the same period of time, the older judge fulfils this duty.

38 full-time judges

The 38 full-time judges and 19 part-time judges carry out their duties in one of the seven divisions of the Federal Supreme Court in Lausanne or Lucerne. The United Federal Assembly appoints judges according to linguistic, regional and political criteria; full-time judges serve a term of office of six years. They are supported by around 130 court clerks, who participate in an advisory capacity in the processing of cases and rulings.

I. First Public Law Division

II. Second Public Law Division

I. First Civil Law Division

II. Second Civil Law Division

Criminal Law Division

I. First Social Law Division

II. Second Social Law Division

The Secretary General

The General Secretariat serves as the administrative headquarters for the Federal Supreme Court and its governing bodies. The Secretary General participates in the meetings of the governing bodies in an advisory capacity. He also heads the court’s scientific and administrative services.
The Federal Supreme Court is the highest judicial authority in Switzerland. The judges in Lausanne and Lucerne may examine appeals against decisions rendered by the cantonal courts of final instance as well as appeals against most of the decisions rendered by federal courts of first instance. The Federal Supreme Court seeks to ensure uniform application of Swiss federal law and helps to shape law in response to changing circumstances.

The Federal Supreme Court is comprised of seven divisions. The First and Second Public Law Divisions are responsible for cases pertaining to the proper conduct of elections and popular votes, taxation decisions, building permits or naturalisation. Such cases often touch upon fundamental issues and the aim is to determine whether the authorities have rendered the same decision in two comparable cases.

The First and Second Civil Law Divisions are mainly responsible for cases pertaining to the Swiss Civil Code (CC) or the Swiss Code of Obligations (CO). Among other things, they examine family law and inheritance law as well as contract or shareholder disputes. Unless the matter pertains to fundamental questions of law, the value of the claim in tenancy and employment law cases must amount to at least CHF 15,000. For all other cases, the minimum threshold is CHF 30,000.

The Criminal Law Division handles complaints filed by convicted persons and public prosecutors. Such cases might include, for instance, disregard for procedural rules, a questionable legal assessment of a given fact or the level of penalty.

The First and Second Social Law Divisions in Lucerne handle all complaints surrounding health and accident insurance or disputes concerning old-age and survivors’ insurance, invalidity insurance, unemployment insurance or other forms of social insurance.

The Federal Supreme Court rules as the court of final instance. Under certain circumstances, natural persons may take their claim to the European Court of Human Rights. If the Court rules that Switzerland is in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, then an attempt may be made to overturn the Federal Supreme Court’s initial ruling.

The Federal Criminal Court is based in Bellinzona. The court delivers verdicts in criminal cases, adjudicates complaints in federal prosecutions and in procedures concerning international assistance in criminal matters and decides conflicts of jurisdictions. Most decisions of the Federal Criminal Court may be appealed to the Federal Supreme Court.

In order to carry out its tasks, the Federal Criminal Court is composed of a Criminal Chamber and an Appeals Chamber. The Criminal Chamber renders decisions on indictments in cases that fall under federal jurisdiction, either by subject matter or by their special nature. Such cases include crimes against the interests of the Swiss Confederation, for example certain offences against federal officials and against federal institutions, or cases of corruption in the Federal Administration. In addition, the Criminal Chamber judges crimes involving the use of explosives and cases of white-collar crime, organised crime, corruption and money laundering that cross national or international jurisdictions. Moreover, the Criminal Chamber is competent for cases arising in connection with civil aviation or the use of nuclear energy.

The Appeals Chamber provides judicial review in appeals against the rulings and procedural measures of the Office of the Attorney General of Switzerland, the Federal Criminal Police, the Compulsory Measures Courts and generally in administrative criminal law. Paramount among its other competences are remedies concerning international assistance in criminal matters, including extraditions to other states, or concerning the execution of foreign sentences in Switzerland or of Swiss sentences abroad. Finally, the Appeals Chamber rules on conflicts of jurisdiction either between prosecuting authorities of the Swiss cantons or with the Swiss Confederation.

The 18 judges of the Federal Criminal Court are elected by the United Federal Assembly for a six-year term of office. Altogether, the Federal Criminal Court has a staff of around 68 officials and clerks. The court acts independently. For administrative purposes, it is supervised by the Federal Supreme Court and the Federal Assembly.
Federal Administrative Court

The Federal Administrative Court is based in St. Gallen. It handles complaints against decisions made by agencies of the Federal Administration. In certain areas, the Federal Administrative Court may examine complaints against decisions made by cantonal authorities. It sometimes rules as the court of first instance in legal proceedings. For most of the matters falling under its jurisdiction, the decisions may be appealed before the Federal Supreme Court.

The Federal Administrative Court handles a very broad spectrum of complex themes, some of which may be controversial from both a social and political standpoint. In recent years the Court acted as the court of first instance in cases on limiting the duration of the operating licence for the Mühleberg nuclear power plant and anonymising facial images and vehicle licence plates in Google Street View.

The Federal Administrative Court is comprised of five divisions. Division I is mainly responsible for complaints pertaining to infrastructure, the environment, transport and communications, energy, taxation and federal employment. Division II is responsible for matters pertaining to education, competition and the economy. Division III mainly handles cases relating to legislation on foreign nationals, citizenship, social insurance and health insurance. Divisions IV and V focus exclusively on asylum legislation, one of the rare areas where the Federal Administrative Court rules in the last instance.

The Federal Administrative Court acts independently when rendering its decisions, but comes under the administrative supervision of the Federal Supreme Court and the oversight of the Federal Assembly. With around 75 judges and 320 court staff, the Federal Administrative Court is Switzerland’s largest federal court.

The judges of the Federal Administrative Court are elected by the United Federal Assembly for a six-year term. In a Charter of Ethics adopted in 2011, the judges of the Federal Administrative Court undertook to abide by a series of principles: carrying out their functions independently, impartially and diligently; acting in a cordial manner; treating others with respect and recognising the value of the work done by all court staff.

Federal Patent Court

The Federal Patent Court in St. Gallen has existed since January 2012. It is the court of first instance for civil disputes concerning patents. Previously it was the cantonal courts that were responsible. Decisions of the Federal Patent Court may be appealed before the Federal Supreme Court.

Patents play an important role in the economy. They protect the rights of inventors, who often incur very high costs to produce their inventions. In disputes, the Federal Patent Court decides whether a patent can be filed for a new technical innovation or a specific process. It is also responsible for deciding whether existing patent rights have been infringed by third parties. The Federal Patent Court may handle other patent-related claims, such as cases where there is dispute over who holds a given patent, or how a patent may be used within the framework of a licence.

The judges of the Federal Patent Court are elected by the Federal Assembly for a six-year term. Only two judges work on a full-time basis. The remaining 36 judges work part-time. Around one third of these judges have specific legal training. The rest have technical training and solid expertise in the field of patent law. They are called in depending on the technical expertise required for the case at hand. This enables cases submitted before the Federal Patent Court to be processed swiftly and cost-effectively, foregoing the need for external expert opinions, which tend to be costly and time-consuming. A high percentage of cases are also settled by compromise between the parties in the dispute.

A particular feature of the Federal Patent Court is that English may be used for submissions and at hearings instead of an official language of Switzerland (German, French, Italian or Romansh) if both parties in the dispute give their consent.
Publisher
Federal Chancellery, Communication Support
Federal Palace West Wing, 3003 Bern
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Content
Information services of the Federal Chancellery, the Departments, the Parliamentary Services and the federal courts

Translation
Language services of the Federal Chancellery, the Departments, the Parliamentary Services and the federal courts

Layout
Federal Chancellery, Communication Support
Atelier Bundi, Boll (cover concept and graphics)
Federal Palace Production Centre, SRG SSR (Infographics)

Photos
Karl-Heinz Hug, Ueberstorf
Martin Mägli, Herbligen (cover)
Rolf Weiss, Ittigen (Corina Casanova p. 1)
Keystone (swearing-in ceremony p. 24)
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Christian Grund / Maurice Haas, Zurich (Federal Council photo p. 38 – 39)
Dominic Büttner / Béatrice Devènes, Zurich / Bern (Federal Council portraits p. 40)

Editorial deadline
31 December 2014

Print run
Total 292 000
- German 200 000
- French 55 500
- Italian 16 000
- Romansh 2 500
- English 18 000

Distribution
This publication can be obtained free of charge from the Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics FOBL
Publication Distribution, 3003 Bern
www.bundespublikationen.admin.ch
Art. No. 104.617.e

37th edition, February 2015