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The Federal Council's objectives in 1998

Openness – Reforms – Future

Persistent unemployment and Switzerland's international position are the two central issues for the Federal Council in 1998. The government will continue the broad strategy which it has pursued since the beginning of the 90s: opening up to the world – reforms at home – investment in the future.

Solidarity at home and abroad, investment in the future: that is a short description of the federal government's policy for 1998. This emerges clearly from the Federal Council's objectives for the year. To achieve these aims the government intends to put some 50 substantial pieces of business to parliament. The Federal Council is basing its priorities for 1998 on a frank and unvarnished review of the present situation.

The government concedes that the economy is showing clear signs of recovery. But despite the better prospects it will be possible only to ease the unemployment problem in 1998, not to solve it.

In foreign affairs too, the government says, there have been episodes and developments which challenge the way we see ourselves. Switzerland's reluctance to become involved in foreign policy issues, and the debate about our country's role in the Second World War affect the view which the rest of the world has of Switzerland.

Opportunities unaffected

In the Federal Council's view the Swiss have to look at the recent past frankly and critically. It will be a time to keep in mind Switzerland's fundamental values and principles. But as we search for solutions to the problems of the day our political and economic opportunities remain unaffected: Switzerland is

still one of the most competitive countries, and as a multicultural society has experience and traditions which remain as relevant as ever.

Solidarity

In the course of the year the Federal Council will make a proposal for a Swiss Foundation for Solidarity. This is intended to give new impetus to our feeling of shared iden-

tity, our sense of community, with the weak at home and abroad, and to project these values into the future.

For in future Switzerland should no longer be content merely to play the role of observer and donor on the international political stage. It should also be a partner and address the issues of the future shoulder to shoulder with the international community.

Our relationship with the EU is a key factor in this. In 1998 the government will also put in hand preparations for Switzerland's accession to the UN. It intends also to improve transfrontier co-operation with neighbouring

Volker Committee – Clarification

In the light of questions from readers, we would like to make it clear that the "Volker Committee" was set up in May 1996 (cf. "Swiss Review" No. 1/98, page 9)

states on internal security and the fight against organised crime.

Investing in the future

The starting point for any campaign against unemployment must be healthy development of the economy. Conscious that tomorrow's welfare depends on today's decisions, the Federal Council plans to commit resources in three key areas in 1998.

Firstly the government intends to promote Switzerland in a targeted way as a place for research and intellectual activity. Secondly the outstanding questions of principle involved in the use of gene technology – so important for the future – must be resolved. The Federal Council has made reform and reinforcement of vocational training its third economic policy priority, for it is aware that initial and further education are not only an economic but also a social investment which can prevent excessive strain falling on the social security net.

There are other issues of importance to be addressed: work needs to be done on adapting labour legislation, and preliminary work is needed on ecological tax reform.

Transport

The transport infrastructure projects too can be seen as long-term investment in greater prosperity. Given the pan-European transport situation, decisions must be taken on building routes across the Alps and on dealing with international heavy

The Federal Council's objectives for the year

Every year since 1996, in late autumn, the Federal Council has made public the objectives which it has set itself for the coming year and the steps it proposes to take to achieve them. These annual objectives fit into the parliament's plans for legislation, which are based on a four-year period and are paramount.

The annual objectives are conceived on the one hand for the benefit of the public – the electorate, parliament and cantons. They provide the material for a speech on fundamentals which the federal president makes to the Federal Assembly every December. At the same time the annual objectives are helpful in providing both a fingerpost for the federal council and the administration itself, and a yardstick for measuring what they have achieved. From time to time over the year the Federal Council checks whether progress is being made as planned, and at the end of the year strikes a balance in a report to parliament on its management, setting out how far its objectives have been attained. In the same context an explanation is given on any failure to attain the objectives set.

The annual objectives are available in writing to anyone interested. They may be obtained without charge in a modern, well presented and easily readable brochure from the Information Service of the Federal Chancellery, CH-3003 Berne. They can also be downloaded from the Internet (<http://www.admin.ch>).





goods transport; decisions which will have to be in harmony with the policies of the EU. These decisions will determine future progress towards a transport and environment policy which is both sustainable and compatible with the interests of Europe. It is this that the Federal Council is working towards.

Social security

There are decisions to be taken in the field of social security too. The Federal Council will decide on appropriate reforms in the light of an across-the-board review of the prospects for the future financing of the social security system. The government believes that preference must be given to underpinning the finances of existing institutions rather than to creating new mechanisms. The government's proposals on the revision of old age and survivors insurance and the law on occupational pension provision, will take this into account.

Finances

All this investment in the future and our opening up internationally must be con-

sistent with the tightening of budgetary policies which the Federal Council wishes to continue in 1998.

Healthy public finances are not only an essential precondition for a competitive economy. Persistent deficits with rising interest payments mean that there are less resources for what needs to be done in the various areas of policy.

Borrowing to meet the cost of solving our present problems would be to burden future generations. The Federal Council has no doubt that such a course would be irresponsible. Accordingly the government continues to attach great importance to balancing the budget by the year 2001.

Werner Thut,
Federal Chancellor

Optional AHV/IV insurance for Swiss Abroad

Recasting the optional old age and survivors' insurance and disability insurance (AHV/IV) for Swiss Abroad is one of the Federal Council's 50 most important pieces of business for 1998. The original reform proposal (see "Swiss Review" 3/97) is being reworked at the moment and will be submitted to the Federal Council again in the first half of 1998. Thereafter it will go through the public hearing process before being debated in parliament.

Initiatives in brief

"Title in land to become a right to use and a right to build"

The initiative "Title in land to become a right to use and a right to build" was launched by a non-partisan committee grouped around a private individual, Werner Schmid-Bieri. If this popular initia-

tive is accepted, land tenure and in the last analysis the whole economic system will be fundamentally changed. The intention of the initiative is to secure the following new provisions in the federal constitution:

- Title to land shall be transformed into land use and building rights for the present owners.
- Land shall become common property and be administered by municipal authorities. It shall be possible to acquire only a right to use land or a right to build on it. Rent for the use of land or for building rights would amount at the most to 2% to 4% of the assessed value of the land.
- Ownership of buildings and movable property would remain unchanged.
- Anyone giving up his right to use or build would be compensated by municipal authorities.

NYF

Renaturalisation

A child born abroad who possesses a foreign nationality as well as Swiss nationality loses the latter if he or she has not registered with a Swiss authority either inside or outside Switzerland before completion of his or her 22nd year of age.

But such a person may apply for renaturalisation within a period of ten years from that date. In order for this to be granted, close connection with Switzerland must be shown. If he or she has lived in Switzerland for three years, an application for renaturalisation may be made after expiry of the ten-year period.

In addition, pursuant to a transitional provision all first-generation dual nationals born abroad who were under the age of 22 on June 30, 1988, but had not registered with a Swiss authority, lost their Swiss nationality on that date. All such persons may apply for renaturalisation until June 30, 1998.

Application for renaturalisation by persons in the above categories may be lodged at their Swiss diplomatic post.

NYF

Current popular initiatives

The following popular initiatives are still open for signature:

For one Sunday without automobiles per season – a trial for four years

until August 11, 1998
Judith Hauptlin, P.O.Box 40,
CH-9414 Schachen bei Reute

For sickness insurance premiums proportional to income and fortune

until October 22, 1998
Elise Kerchenbaum, 25 rue du
Vieux-Billard, P.O. Box 232,
CH-1211 Geneva 8

Property rights to be transformed into usufruct or building rights

until November 20, 1998
Werner Mühlheim, P.O. Box
8140, CH-2500 Bienne 8

For greater traffic safety inside built-up areas thanks to a maximum speed of 30 km/h, with some exceptions (rods for all)

until March 16, 1999
Swiss Traffic Club (VCS),
P.O. Box, CH-3000 Berne 2

Work distribution

until March 16, 1999
Patricia Staub,
P.O. Box 7236, CH-8023 Zurich

For lower hospital expenses

until June 2, 1999
Denner AG, P.O. box 977,
CH-8045 Zurich

Health at a price within reach (health initiative)

until June 9, 1999
Swiss Socialist Party (SPS),
P.O.Box, CH-3001 Berne

Exemplary hospital wards

until June 9, 1999
Kunigunde Grätzer-Karner,
P.O.Box 144, CH-8042 Zurich

Six lanes for the A 1 between Zurich and Berne

until July 13, 1999
National Councillor Michael
E. Dreher, Ränkestrasse 2,
CH-8700 Küsnacht

Six lanes for the A 1 between Geneva and Lausanne

until July 13, 1999
National Councillor Michael
E. Dreher, Ränkestrasse 2,
CH-8700 Küsnacht

A second motorway tunnel for the Gotthard

until July 13, 1999
National Councillor Michael
E. Dreher, Ränkestrasse 2,
CH-8700 Küsnacht

For the suppression of the right of appeal of associations at federal level

until July 13, 1999
National Councillor Michael
E. Dreher, Ränkestrasse 2,
CH-8700 Küsnacht