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The Federal Council's business report for 1997

A difficult year

The Federal Council labels 1997 as difficult, and strongly marked by international developments. For those fields in which it could exercise substantial influence, it has, in the main, realized its annual objectives.

In its 1997 business report the Federal Council undertakes a comparison between the objectives laid down and what was achieved. The report is oriented in a consistent manner on the 1997 annual plans which the Federal Council laid down at the beginning of the year.

International

In assessing the completed business year, the Federal Council refers to the strong influence of international conditions, particularly to the worldwide economic competitive struggle which was expressed in major mergers and mass redundancies.

Repercussions from the international environment were also noticeable in the controversies about Switzerland's behaviour during the Second World War, which were reflected in a widespread internal debate on the part which our country played during that period.

In European policy the unsatisfactory open situation caused by the incomplete bilateral negotiations with the European Union continued into 1997. Once again the Federal Council expresses its opinion emphatically that Switzerland cannot isolate itself from either international developments or from the new general conditions.

Social security

In view of the difficult economic situation, measures for strengthening social security again stood in the foreground during 1997. In this connection the Federal Council plans to contribute above

all to the creation of conditions which do not disfavour the economic actors in international comparison, while making structural change possible, and at the same time provide a careful cushioning of the social costs of the changes.

It was in this sense that in 1997 the Federal Council put forward particularly an investment programme amounting to 560 million francs, as well as a company tax reform proposal. With the liberalization of the field of telecommunications and post the Federal Council reached a situation in which the two new corporations, Telecom

and Post, could appear on the market at the same time as their European competitors in a new form of competition.

Finally the Federal Council proposed a new "Budget Objective 2001" which put the Federal Council and Parliament on an obligatory growth path (a referendum was held on this proposal on June 7th, see pp. 14-15). Linked with this project was the realization of an appropriate stabilization programme which included savings of a good two billion francs, mainly in the fields of social security, transport, national defense, education, research, agriculture and foreign relations.

Solidarity

In the wake of the economic structural change, questions of solidarity between the stronger and the weaker took a central place in the public

Optional AHV/IV

• Age limit at 50

According to the instructions for the optional age for the AHV/IV the declaration of readiness to join may be lodged up to one's 51st birthday (exceptions reserved).

• Women

Following the tenth AHV-revision, women may now join independently on an optional basis from January 1st 1997. They may also retire from the insurance scheme individually as long as they fulfill the other conditions required by the law.

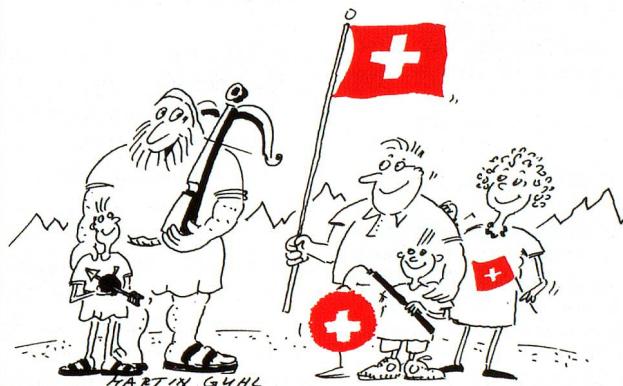
debate in 1997. In the social security sphere, the Federal Council refrained in 1997 from making any basic change in direction since the relevant work on the new financing prospects was still at a preparatory stage. Consolidation measures with regard to the existing social security structure stood in the foreground.

Over and above this, it was the approaching jubilee year of 1998 which gave occasion for reflection about our living together in one state in the widest sense of the term. As a leading subject and an orientation point for the present and the coming years the Federal Council launched the "Solid Switzerland" Foundation. This is intended to herald a revival of our tradition of solidarity with the weaker both at home and abroad, and also to express our thanks for the peaceful and democratic conditions which have maintained our present form of government since its foundation.

Balance sheet

A look back over the year 1997 shows that substantial plans have been realized. In the eyes of the Federal Council, the guidelines of the legislative planning period 1995 to 1999 strengthening

1st August abroad



For many Swiss abroad, 1st August is an important day on which they think of their homeland or that of their forefathers. In many embassies and consulates, there is a national day reception – usually organised together with Swiss associations. Swiss Radio International provides a national day programme on a cassette, with an address by the President of the Confederation, accompanied by bell ringing and the national anthem. This is made available to Swiss associations by diplomatic posts. The Secretariat for the Swiss abroad sends out the text to Swiss associations and institutions in six languages. But organising national day is mainly a matter for the Swiss association in the colony and the authorities are under no obligation to organise a reception.

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prosperity, the government's ability to decide, national cohesion, sustainable development, continue as logical constants of the Federal Council's policy.

In the report it is openly stated which objectives the Federal Council laid down for 1997, and the extent to which these were achieved. In the same way it states where delays occurred. As the main reasons for these, the Federal Council mentions the international conditions which hindered Federal

Council decision-making with their repercussions stemming from the activity of Parliament and referendum democracy, as well as the weaknesses of traditional administrative structures. In this connection the Federal Council reminds us that it recognized these problems years ago and has already taken important measures against them in the context of its work on government and administrative reform. Against this backdrop, it decided to submit to Parliament

proposals for strengthening the Federal Council under reserve that it is confident that it can face up to the challenges of the next few years.

The printed version of the report may be obtained free of charge in exchange for a stamped and ad-

dressed envelope, from the Swiss Federal Chancellery, Section for Planning matters, 3003 Berne. It may also be called up on the Internet at <http://www.admin.ch>.

**Werner Thut,
Federal Chancellery**

Current popular initiatives

The following popular initiatives are still open for signature:

For sickness insurance premiums proportional to income and fortune
until October 22, 1998

Elise Kerchenbaum, 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 Biel/Bienne 8

For greater traffic safety inside built-up areas thanks to a maximum speed of 30 km/h, with some exceptions (Roads for all)
until March 16, 1999
Automobile Club of Switzerland (ACS), 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

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

For a credible security policy and a Switzerland without an Army

until September 17th 1999

Group for a Switzerland without an army, Nico Lutz, P.O. Box 6348, 3001 Berne.

Solidarity creates security: for an optional civil service for peace (SPC)

until September 17th 1999

Group for a Switzerland without an army, Nico Lutz, P.O. Box 6348, 3001 Berne.

Moratorium Plus – to prolong the moratorium against the construction of nuclear power stations and limitation of the nuclear risk (Moratorium Plus)

until October 1st 1999

Association "Strom ohne Atom", Leo Scherer, P.O. Box 2322, 8031 Zurich.

Away from nuclear power – for a turning point in the energy field and for the progressive dismantlement of nuclear power stations (Away from nuclear power)

(until October 1st 1999)

Association "Strom ohne Atom", Leo Scherer, P.O. Box 2322, 8031 Zurich.

Renaturalisation: correction

A child born abroad who possesses a foreign nationality as well as Swiss nationality loses the latter if his or her birth has not been 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 more than 22 years old on June 30, 1988**, (and not: 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.

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Initiatives in brief

Roads for all

The initiative for "increased traffic security by speed limits of 30 within localities with exceptions (Roads for all)" was launched by the left green Automobile Club of Switzerland (ACS). The authors of the initiative would like to include the following new provision in the Federal Constitution:

- Within localities the general top speed limit should be

30 km an hour. The competent authorities may decree exceptions in justified cases.

Within a year after acceptance by the people and the cantons the responsible authorities shall enact the necessary executive instruments and order the equivalent highest speed limits within localities.

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Sickness insurance

As a general rule those residing outside Switzerland are not subject to obligatory sickness insurance but health insurance companies are entitled to continue to insure persons resident abroad. They are, however, not obliged to do so (optional contract).

In the case of insured compatriots abroad who are undergoing medical treatment before 1st January 1997 health insurers are obliged to maintain the insurance relationship according to the old law until the conclusion of the negotiations. For any questions thereto, please contact the insurance companies directly.

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