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Year 2000 Problem

Things to note!

Nowadays computer technology is used in power plants, hospitals, banks and a thousand other fields. With the imminent millennium changeover these applications are being checked for "Y2K compatibility". We take a closer look.

The "millennium bug" is a problem that is being seriously addressed and one which will potentially occur at the same time throughout the world. The impact and associated risks depend on the success of the precautions which public and private sectors have implemented. In Switzerland – provided the work already begun is completed on time – opinion is confident in a smooth millennium changeover.

Elsewhere the problem must be looked into locally. The situation differs widely from country to country and even sector to sector.

Background

Extremists who are predicting the end of the world on the millennium changeover or believe the problem has been manufactured as a clever money-making scam, have not thought the subject through in sufficient detail. At the root of the year 2000 or Y2K problem is a trivial technical oversight: the decision to record the year as two digits rather than four i.e. 99 instead of 1999. This can lead to malfunctions in data processing systems, in the control and monitoring of production, administrative and distribution processes, in building technology (for example air conditioning, lifts and access control systems), and programmable installations and equipment. In short: the problem can occur anywhere and everywhere.

In addition to public organisations and private busi-

ness, therefore, it is important for utilities to continue functioning correctly. In Switzerland we can assume that normal conditions will prevail in the energy production and distribution area. Communications and information infrastructures, too, are expected to run only normal risks at year-end (for example network overload, particularly for mobile telephones). The transportation sector will operate at the normal level of safety, and only in the air transport sector is a certain reduction in the level of reliability anticipated. The provision of daily

supplies to the general public can be judged as reliable.

Y2K focal point

The World Bank and a number of private consulting companies are preparing update tables on national risks. Reports on these national risks are generally given in the local media. Many states have set up a "National Y2K Focal Point" to provide official information on the situation in each country.

General situation abroad

Outside Switzerland it is more difficult to assess the situation, since an on-site evaluation is essential. Depending on the outcome, measures may need to be taken.

Swiss representatives

Swiss embassies and consulates abroad have examined their internal systems and equipment in depth and are basically well prepared. No major system failures are anticipated.

Nevertheless a residual risk remains, particularly in terms of external influences (power supply, telecommunications, post etc.), and the probabilities of system crashes differ from country to country. So despite every precaution having been taken, the possibility of delays or the temporary unavailability of certain Swiss representative services cannot be entirely excluded.

In the case of matters which cannot be postponed until the situation has stabilised, we therefore recommend that you contact Swiss representatives before the changeover. In particular, travel documents should be checked and new permits and extensions of validity should be applied for in good time.

Medicine

It may be useful to contact your local hospital, although no self-respecting hospital would consider jeopardising its operations. Nevertheless, the credibility of their statements can be more or less determined depending on the response and the hospital's policy. To avoid unnecessary risks it is advisable not to plan non-urgent operations or medical interventions for a date directly prior to or after year-end. In the case of more urgent treatment or events already scheduled (for example births), the risks should be calculated and the venue for such treatment should be planned.





If patients are dependent on regular treatment involving medical machinery and equipment and no adequate guarantee of ongoing treatment can be given locally, it may be worth considering travelling in good time to a location with a more securely functioning medical system. Essential medications should also be planned in advance.

Air travel

According to current information there should be fewer problems in this area than previously anticipated. No problems are expected with travel from Switzerland, i.e. Swiss airlines, airports and air traffic control will not be affected. In the case of more exotic airlines and destinations, however, delays and cancellations are entirely possible, and we advise against such forms of travel around the changeover date. If it is not possible to postpone your travel plans, you should allow for margins of delay.

Electronic payment transactions

In mid-May the inter-bank test – the only endeavour of its type in the world – was successfully conducted in Switzerland. To simulate data transfer, the computer systems of 112 commercial banks, the Swiss National Bank (SNB) and Postfinance were networked with the systems of the Swiss stock exchange and the joint instruments for electronic funds transfer and securities exchange. The test confirmed the functional reliability of these systems even under year-end conditions. The reliability of electronic funds transfer (including credit card operations) and cash dispensing facilities is therefore assured.

Swiss Abroad are dependent on the reliability of EFT systems in their host country.

Mailing of voting documentation: reminder on deadlines

Under the terms of voting procedures and the Federal Law on political rights, the deadlines for mailing ballot slips for National Council elections are tighter than for referendums. For Swiss Abroad the deadline is unfortunately particularly tight. Please therefore cast your vote immediately. We apologise to anyone who has received documentation late due to delays in posting.

If financial institutions have not yet published any relevant information, we recommend that you ask your bank whether payments are guaranteed to function correctly. In the case of credit card payments abroad, practically no additional Y2K risks are anticipated. Additionally, when it comes to cross-border payment transactions it is important for all the parties involved to be able to fulfil their part of the transaction without problems. It is therefore advisable to conduct international financial transactions in good time.

Voluntary AHV/IV

According to information issued by the Swiss Compensation Office in Geneva, payment of benefits (for example, pensions) is assured. A

networking test is to be conducted in the third quarter of this year with foreign partners. This will ensure the timely correction of any resultant defects.

Mail

Letters and parcels can only be conveyed by properly functioning mail and transport systems. In Switzerland no problems are expected in this respect. Outside Switzerland the reliability of such services can only be determined in the respective countries. As with payment transactions, the various mail and transport systems may entail convoluted networking. Due to the complex nature of cross-border mail traffic, margins should be built in for delays. We recommend that New Year mail be dispatched

before 15 November 1999. If time does not allow this, or if sensitive timing is involved, express delivery services such as DHL and TNT should be used. Because fewer intermediaries are involved in such services, the risks are lower. However, to be doubly sure you should advise the relevant providers of these services in good time and not wait until the last mailing deadline.

For further information, contact: Year 2000 Delegate, Sonneggstrasse 21 CH-8006 Zurich Tel +41 1 260 1999 Fax +41 1 260 26 38 E-mail: jahr2000-delegierter@sunweb.ch, Internet: 222.millennium.ch
Ulrich Grete
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*Ulrich Grete is the Year 2000 Delegate to the Federal Council. Susanne Kiener works with Ulrich Grete; Hans-Rudolf Hodel is Year 2000 Officer and Head of the Human Resources Department of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (EDA); Rolf Frei is on the staff of the EDA's Representation Network and Consular Services Section.

Initiatives in brief

Working hours initiative

The Swiss Trades Union Congress has launched an initiative entitled "For shorter working hours", which calls for the following amendment to the Federal Constitution:

1. The maximum annual working hours for employees shall be 1872 hours, from which legally defined holidays and public holidays are deducted.

2. Over and above this, up to 100 hours of overtime may

be worked subject to extra pay. Overtime is generally to be compensated by time off in lieu and may be carried over at year-end.

3. The maximum working hours per week including overtime shall be 48 and may not be exceeded. In every contract of employment the normal working hours must be defined.

4. There shall be no discrimination against part-time

employees in favour of full-time employees, in particular with respect to recruitment, task assignment, workplace design, vocational training and further education, promotion, redundancy and social insurance, including occupational pension scheme.

NYF

Current popular initiatives

The following popular initiatives are still open for signature:

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

(until 1 October 1999)

Association "Strom ohne Atom", Leo Scherer, PO Box 2322, CH-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 1 October 1999)

Association "Strom ohne Atom", Leo Scherer, PO Box 2322, CH-8031 Zurich

For a sufficient range of vocational training (apprenticeships' initiative)

(until 28 October 1999)

Sarah Müller, Postgasse 21, CH-3001 Berne

For shorter working hours (until 11 November 1999)

Swiss Trades Union Congress, Monbijoustr. 61, CH-3007 Berne

For a capital gains tax

(until 11 November 1999)

Swiss Trades Union Congress, Monbijoustr. 61, CH-3007 Berne

For freedom of expression and simultaneous lifting of the prohibition on race discrimination

(until 12 November 1999)

Kunigunde Grätzer-Karner, PO Box 114, CH-8042 Zurich

The individual sovereignty of citizens (installation, as a supreme judicial body, of a Technical Commission of the Senate of a Swiss Academy for Technology, Vital Questions and Science)

(until 12 November 1999)

Kunigunde Grätzer-Karner, PO Box 114, CH-8042 Zurich

For mother and child – for the protection of the unborn

child and aid for his mother in distress

(until 2 December 1999)

Dominik Müggler, PO Box, CH-4011 Basle

For a secure income in the event of illness (daily allowance initiative)

(until 16 December 1999)

Swiss Trades Union Congress, PO Box 64, CH-3000 Berne 23

Equal rights for handicapped persons

(until 4 February 2000)

Konrad Stoker, ASKIO, Effingerstrasse 55, 3008 Berne

For Switzerland's adhesion to the United Nations (UN)

(until 3 March 2000)

Association for Switzerland's Adhesion to the United Nations (UN), PO Box 734, CH-4003 Basle

For the safe and wholesome provision of medication (Medication Initiative)

(until 15 March 2000)

Swiss Apothecaries Associa-

tion, Max Brentano, Stationstr. 12, PO Box 193, CH-3097 Bern-Liebefeld

Lifelong internment for perpetrators of sexual or violent crimes who are judged to be highly dangerous and untreatable

(until 3 May 2000)

Self-help Group "Licht der Hoffnung", Anita Chaaban, PO Box, CH-9471 Buchs SG

Against abuse of the right of asylum

(until 25 November 2000)

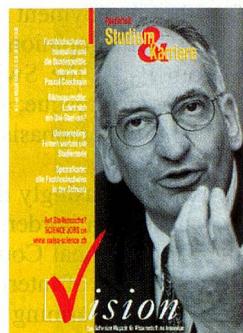
Swiss People's Party, Aliko Panayides, Brückfeldstrasse 18, PO Box, CH-3000 Berne 26

For popular initiatives to be put to the vote within six months, excluding the Federal Council and Parliament

(until 22 December 2000)

Flavio Maspoli, National Councillor, Medeag SA, 6648 Minusio

Attractive brochure on Swiss universities of applied sciences



Switzerland's higher education system is currently undergoing reform. The most important innovation is the creation of seven regional universities of applied sciences, designed primarily to provide persons who have completed a commercial apprenticeship with the possibility of going on to university once they have their professional maturity diploma.

Professional Education and Technology (BBT) has prepared an attractive brochure in English. The brochure was published as a special issue of the scientific/political magazine "Vision" and can be ordered from the publisher by filling in the form below.

The publication describes the status of the universities of applied sciences within the education system as well as covering aspects of quality assurance and research and the recognition of diplomas. The main thrust of the brochure is a presentation of the

Order Form

Annual subscription(s) to "Vision" (quarterly)
 German edition French edition English edition
at CHF 55.- (Europe) or CHF 65.- (overseas) incl. shipping costs and VAT.
 Special issue, "The Universities of Applied Sciences in Switzerland", the official information brochure on Swiss universities, at CHF 30.- incl. shipping costs and VAT.

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Information platform and job market

"Vision", the Swiss magazine for science and innovation, is produced on behalf of the Group for Science and Research (GWF) and the Federal Office for Education and Science (BBW). The publication reports on people, trends and facts in the fields of education, science and innovation. In addition it offers an academic job clearing house on the internet, to provide Swiss Abroad with a more transparent view of the Swiss job market. Besides jobs it also offers practical traineeships. See under www.swiss-science.ch