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Openness to the world – quality of life at home

The motto “Openness and co-operativeness externally – attractiveness and quality of life at home” reflects the Federal Council’s aims for the 1999-2003 legislature period.

As Federal President Adolf Ogi emphasised to the media, our country stands at the threshold of a new millennium. The Federal Council is convinced that concordance, federalism and direct democracy will continue to act as the foundations of a strong, prosperous Switzerland, provided consensus is achieved on additional decisions on key issues for the future. At the same time the Swiss President re-emphasised the will of the national government to perform its leading role in this process.

Three main themes

Three main themes dominate the Federal Council’s policy over the next four years. Due to the fact that many problems and challenges can only be tackled through international co-operation, the Federal Council aims to establish Switzerland’s reputation as a reliable partner on the world stage, and leverage opportunities for an open Switzerland with international presence.

Given the fact that Switzerland, as a country without natural resources, can only compete in the world market if it further develops its most important resources (knowledge, entrepreneurial initiative, and creativity), the Federal Council wants to create optimum conditions for promoting Switzerland as an attractive place to work and study.

And in view of the important achievements of our nation, the



Photo: zvg

Federal President Adolf Ogi looks ahead with confidence.

Federal Council aims to ensure quality of life and development capability for the country as a whole.

Partner on the global stage

Developments in the 1990s demonstrated that economic and technological globalisation are proving an important growth engine for individual countries. The

dominant theme nowadays is European and world-wide convergence as well as cross-border, supranational forms of organisation and cooperation.

Economic and monetary union and current plans to expand the European Union (EU) represent far-reaching changes which directly impact our country. In the wake

of these developments our framework for shaping an active, independent future is defined by opportunities for co-operation and co-determination at an international level.

The Federal Council firmly believes that we can promote our interests more effectively by acting as dependable partners on the world stage and projecting a more consistent image of Switzerland as an open, multicultural nation. For this reason it has set itself four goals over the next four years: 1. To improve opportunities for international collaboration. 2. To expand foreign and security policy in order to increase presence in the fields of peace promotion, protection of human rights and development co-operation, and improve the position and awareness of Switzerland on the international stage. 3. To promote an open and sustainable global economy. 4. To implement the new security policy under the motto “Security through co-operation”.

Centre of employment and study

The Federal Council aims to create optimum conditions for Switzerland as an attractive centre of employment and study/research as well as secure and enhance development opportunities for the next generations. With this in mind, it has set the following five objectives in this area:

1. To strengthen the competitiveness of Swiss industry and create additional employment opportunities.
2. To balance the federal budget, introduce a moderate tax rate and a balanced, fair fiscal and financial policy.
3. To implement an environmental, transport and energy policy based on the →

Importance of legislative planning

The Federal Council’s report on plans for the 1999–2003 legislative period sets the political guidelines for its activities over the next four years. It provides an overview of the Federal Council’s strategic objectives and priorities. In the words of Federal Chancellor Annemarie Huber-Hotz, as a strategic management instrument the legislative plans form the principal framework for the annual objectives (see “Swiss Review” 2/2000). Based on defined priorities, both mechanisms help to steer the work of the administration and ensure greater cohesion in legislative and administrative activities. Parliament always acknowledges the multi-year programme but can also propose amendments. NYF

strategy of "Sustainable development in Switzerland". 4. To address the challenges of the information society and adapt the media structure accordingly. 5. To enhance the state's effectiveness and practise citizen-friendly administration.

With a view to enhancing Switzerland's attractiveness as a domicile for all its residents and enabling all generations to identify with the country, the Federal Council has defined the following three objectives:

1. To secure national solidarity through guaranteeing social and regional equilibrium. 2. To redirect policy on foreign nationals and achieve stabilisation in the asylum area based on Switzerland's humanitarian tradition. 3. To maintain the high level of internal security while guaranteeing basic rights.

Legislature's financial plan

The legislature's financial plan for 2001–2003, approved by the Federal Council as an integral component of general legislative planning and presented to the media by Finance Minister Kaspar Villiger, for the first time affords an opportunity to evaluate key focuses, objectives and guidelines against the backdrop of its guiding financial principles. It therefore represents an essential management tool: for the administration it forms an impor-

tant guideline and reference point, and for parliament a necessary basis for controlling federal finances.

The legislative financial plan for 2001–2003 is as follows: while expenditure over income for 2001 (CHF 935 million) only just scrapes below the permissible upper deficit threshold (CHF 950 million), a balanced result is envisaged for year-end 2002 and even a surplus of income over expenditure estimated at around CHF 1700 million for 2003. The key financial indicators (state and tax quotient, deficit and debt quotient) confirm this positive trend.

These key figures for the 2001–2003 financial plan indicate that the federal budget is on a steady course, and that the federal budget goals can be achieved without recourse to sanctioning mechanisms. However, this satisfactory state of affairs is subject to certain risks.

A balanced budget is dependent on the following key prerequisites: sustained economic development, moderate inflation, low interest rates, a further drop in the number of unemployed to below 80,000, financial consolidation of the AHV/IV within the framework of the 11th AHV revision, a reduction in the number of persons subject to asylum law, and a continuance of the current fiscal platform.

NYF

«Gold initiative»

The Swiss People's Party has launched the initiative in favour of "Surplus gold reserves for the AHV fund (gold initiative)", calling for the following addition to the federal constitution:

"If currency reserves are no longer required for monetary and

currency policies, they or the earnings from them must be transferred from the National Bank to the Old Age and Survivors' Insurance Fund. The federal legislature must define the details."

NYF

How do I claim my pension?

- If you are a member of the optional pension scheme (AHV/IV), you will automatically receive an application form for an old-age pension from your Swiss diplomatic post a few months before you reach pensionable age.

- If you are not or are no longer a member of the optional pension

scheme but belonged for at least one year to either the compulsory or the optional state pension schemes, you will not be automatically informed of your rights. In such cases you should apply to your Swiss diplomatic post a few months before you reach pensionable age, since you will be entitled to at least a partial pension.

Voluntary AHV/IV

• Age limit 50

According to a guideline on the voluntary AHV/IV, applications for membership may be submitted until the 51st birthday (with some exceptions).

• Women

From 1 January 1997 following the 10th revision of the AHV, women too can register independently for membership of the voluntary AHV/IV scheme and cancel the insurance on an individual basis, provided the other legal requirements are met.

Current popular initiatives

The following popular initiatives are still open for signature:

Against abuse of the right of asylum

(until 25 November 2000)
Swiss People's Party, Alikí Panayides, Brückfeldstrasse 18
PO Box, CH-3000 Berne 26

Moratorium on taxes

(until 1 March 2001)
Liberal Democratic Party of Switzerland, Johannes Matyassy
PO Box 6136, CH-3001 Berne.

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, CH-6648 Minusio

Avanti – for safe and efficient motorways

(until 11. July 2001)
Touring Club of Switzerland TCS
Rudolf Zumbühl, chemin de Blandonnet 4, PO Box 820
CH-1214 Vernier GE

For redirecting surplus gold reserves to the AHV fund (gold initiative)

(until 10 February 2001)
Swiss People's Party, Peter Kneubühler, Brückfeldstrasse 18
PO Box, CH-3000 Berne 26.

Animals are not objects!

(until 29. August 2001)
Fondation Franz Weber
Villa Dubochet 16
CH-1815 Clarens VD

For better animal rights (animal initiative)

(until 14. September 2001)
Dr. A.F. Goetschel, Postfach 218
Ilgenstrasse 22, CH-8030 Zürich