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Switzerland is growing – or shrinking; as climate changes, so do borders

Confirmation that glaciers between Switzerland and Italy have drifted over the decades has sent both sides to the drawing board to redefine parts of the border.

passes through. If it's like the edge of a knife, it's well defined and easy to recognise. In other cases officials might have defined the border as the highest

try's eastern and western borders are not high enough to be affected by shifting glaciers.

Switzerland's topographers also want to make sure data are



Walliser Alpen mit Matterhorn

A line of around 750km, established in 1861 and fixed, based on data from 1940, has to be adjusted on account of rapidly melting snow and ice in the high Alps, including in an area around the famed Matterhorn.

The issue of redrawing about ten per cent of the border between the countries is as much about warmer temperatures and shifting glaciers as how the two countries agreed to define the border almost 150 years ago.

It is a technical exercise, both parties say, and hardly one either side is wrangling over. Rather than negotiating a new border, bureaucrats are looking to see whether particular markers have shifted. And in the case where they have, they redraw the lines.

In the Mittelland, the border is a straight line between points. In the high mountains borders were defined in words. There are natural landmarks that the border

point on a particular glacier or the spot at which water would flow to one side or another. As the terrain changed, the borders should have changed, too. But they didn't. The difference can be up to 100 metres.

The map with the new border cannot be released yet. Switzerland's foreign minister has to sign off on it and before Italian politicians do the same, the changes remain unofficial.

In Italy it requires a change of law and the concept of a so-called "mobile border" has to be debated in the Italian parliament. Even so, it is a relatively uncontroversial move for both sides.

Both sides have agreed to establish a new methodology for examining the Swiss-Italian border. Italy has also formed pacts with neighboring France and Austria. Switzerland also shares a border with the two countries but the mountains on the coun-

up-to-date for hikers and climbers. The proliferation of global positioning systems – including those in mobile phones – has had an impact on the pace at which authorities are responding to the latest geographic changes.

from swissinfo

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