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The Federal Council

Preview of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly

Federal Council report to the Foreign Affairs
Committees

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The General Assembly (GA) is the only UN body in which all 193 member states are represented. As set out in the UN Charter, the GA discusses any issues relating to one of the UN's areas of activity. The GA has six main committees, which means it addresses a wide range of issues: from sustainable development and human rights to disarmament.

The upcoming 78th session of the GA will run from September 2023 to September 2024. In addition to the current armed conflicts and humanitarian crises around the world, including Ukraine, and other ongoing developments (such as climate change), the session is expected to be marked in particular by a number of summit meetings and preparatory work for the UN's Summit of the Future, initiated by Secretary-General António Guterres. The summit is scheduled to take place in September 2024 under the motto 'Multilateral solutions for a better tomorrow'. The goal is to flesh out the secretary-general's vision as outlined in Our Common Agenda for an interconnected and effective multilateralism, resulting in a new Pact for the Future.

Preview of selected topics

Switzerland is particularly interested in the following four topics that will be addressed during the 78th session.

Finance and taxation

As part of the Summit of the Future, the secretary-general intends to propose reforms to the current global financial architecture. This will include issues relating to sovereign debt as well as new indicators to measure prosperity beyond GDP. Switzerland intends to ensure with concrete proposals that there is no duplication of the existing structures and discussion forums within the international financial institutions.

In addition, discussions on taxation-related international cooperation are increasingly held within the framework of the GA – at the initiative of a number of developing and emerging countries. The 78th session is expected to address options for a multilateral framework in this area. Switzerland is again keen to avoid any process that may lead to duplicating existing forums and mechanisms, such as the OECD.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda will be another of the 78th session's top priorities, particularly the implementation of Our Common Agenda but also the SDG Summit. This summit, due to take place in September, is only the second since the adoption of the SDGs. It will allow the international community to conduct a mid-term review of how the 2030 Agenda is being implemented, with a view to identifying exactly where and how efforts must be stepped up in order to reach the SDG targets. The summit will also enable states to discuss how to revitalise the agenda's implementation, such as by improving private sector engagement.

In addition, the upcoming GA will address sustainable development issues at a number of forums, including the Climate Ambition Summit – a high-level dialogue for development finance – as well as high-level meetings on preventing and combating pandemics, and other health-related matters. Here, the strengthening of effective global health governance with Geneva as the seat of the World Health Organization (WHO) is set to play a key role.

International law

It is clear that international law is under growing pressure, not least in view of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, a serious violation of the UN Charter. This also applies to human rights, the universality of which is increasingly being questioned – not

only in the GA. It is therefore highly probable that issues relating to international law will be raised in a large number of processes at the 78th session. One example likely to be discussed in connection with the war in Ukraine is the need for measures to combat impunity and strengthen international judicial bodies. It is also expected that the negotiations for a global digital compact will raise questions about the application of international law, especially human rights, in the digital space. The upcoming 75th anniversaries of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions should also make international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights more visible.

As a globally-connected and export-oriented country, Switzerland places international law at the heart of its global relations. It relies on universally-binding rules of international law to maintain a secure legal framework and prevent a 'might makes right' approach.

UN reforms

Given the current isolationist tendencies and geopolitical shifts, the UN's role as an actor for peace is more important than ever. The UN must however be able to deal with the challenges and crises of today and tomorrow, hence the current reform process to make the organisation's structures and processes more flexible and capable of adapting whenever necessary. The 78th session will focus on the consistent implementation of previously adopted reform steps as well as concrete proposals for a UN 2.0 as set out by the secretary-general with a view to the Summit of the Future.

As a vocal advocate for the reform process and in its capacity as a host state, Switzerland welcomes in particular all efforts by UN bodies for better and more secure data usage and collection, strategic forecasting, and digital tools. To this end, the relevant stakeholders must continue to be included in UN processes. The reform process for the Security Council is likely to attract a great deal of attention, although reaching a consensus needed to advance these reforms still appears to be difficult.

Switzerland's role

In keeping with its aspiration to play an active role in shaping multilateralism and pursue a coherent foreign policy, Switzerland will continue to be involved in current and future UN processes in the GA and other UN bodies. This demonstrates to the international community that Switzerland is a reliable partner willing to take on responsibility. In this regard, Switzerland is actively involved in a broad range of areas (e.g. peace and security, humanitarian aid, human rights, sustainability, the environment, and the UN reforms) and works to ensure support for International Geneva. The basis for these activities are the foreign policy strategy, foreign economic policy strategy, the 2021 Report on security policy, the International Cooperation Strategy 2021–24, the 2030 Sustainable Development Strategy, and a number of other geographical and thematic strategies of the Federal Council.