



# At the heart of Swiss policy on Europe

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**Europe is important for Switzerland, as an economic partner, in security matters and as a holiday destination. The close cooperation between Switzerland and European countries must be constantly fostered to ensure that it works smoothly. At the same time, Switzerland needs to effectively advocate its interests vis-a-vis the European Union (EU). These tasks are the daily work of the Directorate for European Affairs DEA, the competence centre of the Confederation for all matters of European policy.**

There are hardly any areas of government activity in Europe in which the EU is not involved. The activities of the EU often also have an impact on Switzerland. The institutions of the EU are important interlocutors for Switzerland in foreign and economic relations. This is either because our neighbouring states have partly or entirely transferred responsibilities to the EU or because European issues are now increasingly coordinated via the EU.

As the EU is active in so many areas, it is almost inevitable that units throughout the Federal Administration have contacts with EU bodies. This is true not only of the Federal Administration. Connections to the EU are also becoming increasingly important in areas for which the cantons have responsibility.

The Directorate for European Affairs DEA observes and analyses developments in the EU and in European law and their consequences for Switzerland. It also fulfils an important role in the formulation of Switzerland's policy towards the EU and its member states by preparing the decisions and conducting negotiations in collaboration with the competent specialised services. The Directorate is also mandated to inform the general public about Switzerland's policy on Europe and European integration in general.

## History

The DEA was founded in 1961 as the Integration Office FDFA/FDEA. This was a time when the new order was being established on the European continent. Germany, France, Italy and the three Benelux states (Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg) supranational institutions such as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC, 1951), the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom, 1957) and started off the process of European integration. In response to this development, Switzerland and a number of other

states formed the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1960. Their goal was to work together more closely with the above institutions in the economic sphere but without having to adopt supranational laws.

During this time of upheaval, Friedrich Traugott Wahlen, head of what was then the Federal Political Department (later the FDFA) and Hans Schaffner, head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs (later the EAER), together took the initiative, as part of the organisational measures for the treatment of integration issues, to set up an office for integration matters, whose job would be to look into the economic and political aspects of European integration. The relevant resolution was passed by the Federal Council on 11 December 1961. This shows that the Swiss government has always viewed the effects of EU policies on Switzerland in a comprehensive manner that goes beyond purely economic issues.

If we look at the course of the European integration process, we see that the internal market was gradually established and that the movement towards an economic and currency union became increasingly stronger. Switzerland has since developed an intricate network of agreements with the EU. The Free Trade Agreement of 1972 and the Bilateral Agreements of 1999 and 2004 are milestones along this path.

On 1 January 2013, the DEA succeeded the Integration Office, taking the form of a directorate of the FDFA.

## Core activities

The Directorate for European Affairs is the competence centre of the Swiss Confederation for questions concerning policy on Europe. It plays an essential role in coordinating all matters concerning relations between Switzerland and the European Union and its member states. Thus if a federal office

wishes to make contact with the European Commission, the DEA and Switzerland's mission to the EU establish the required connection.

To enable it to fulfil this coordination and hub function, the Federal Council has entrusted the DEA with an observational, operational and an informational role:

- *Observation:* the DEA monitors developments in Europe, and analyses and evaluates its impact on Switzerland;
- *Coordination and negotiation:* the DEA coordinates the implementation and development of Switzerland's bilateral relations with the European states and the EU; it prepares the negotiations and conducts them in conjunction with the relevant specialised services. In addition, it acts as the contact point for external bodies wishing to address the Federal Administration (cantons, associations, political parties, etc.);
- *Information:* the DEA informs the media and the general public about Switzerland's EU policy and about the European integration process.

### Personnel and organisation

To carry out these three main tasks, the Directorate for European Affairs comprises three divisions and has a staff of about 50. It has been directed since February 2018 by State Secretary Roberto Balzaretto.

The Economic Affairs Division serves as the interface to the Federal Administration for everything that concerns the concrete application of existing agreements between Switzerland and the EU. It analyses everything to do with the EU's economic, financial, monetary and fiscal policy. The division also coordinates negotiations in the following areas: free movement of persons, transport, energy, environment, agriculture, public health, research, innovation, space, education and training, culture, media, statistics and regional policy.

The Political Affairs Division is primarily responsible for monitoring the EU's activities and its political and institutional developments in the following areas: Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), justice and home affairs, Schengen/Dublin and Enlargement Policy. It prepares and coordinates the decisions of the Federal Council concerning policy on Europe.

The Division for Bilateral Relations defines the foreign policy guidelines for Switzerland's relations with its neighbours and all other Western and Central European states – including the EU member states, the partner states of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Andorra, the Holy See, Monaco, San Marino – and implements these in close cooperation with the Swiss embassies in these countries. In implementing Switzerland's policy on relations with its neighbours, the division also takes into account various aspects of crossborder relations and supports, among other things, the cantons in the area of crossborder cooperation. In addition, the division also houses the Swiss ambassador to the Principality of Liechtenstein, who is based in Bern, from where Switzerland's diplomatic relations with the Principality are conducted.

The Information Section informs the public and media through various information channels. It has its own website and runs a conference and information service. In addition, within the Federal Administration, it is responsible for coordinating and advising on communication with regard to questions of European policy.

The DEA also includes a Section for Law and Agreements, which carries out coordination tasks and provides legal advice in all dossiers dealing with European affairs for the whole federal administration. In particular, it provides legal support to other federal offices conducting negotiations with the EU and ensures the coherence of the legal provisions of the many bilateral agreements.

The cantons participate in the foreign policy of the Swiss Confederation in those areas where their essential competences or interests are concerned. Such participation involves an obligation of information reciprocity between the Confederation and the cantons. The cantonal information officers within the directorate are responsible for this exchange of information for all matters concerning European affairs. They work on the mandate of the Conference of Cantonal Governments (CoCGs).

#### Further information

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