

Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23

OVERVIEW



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

Foreword

Swiss foreign policy reflects the traditions, diversity and innovative strengths of our country. It makes an essential contribution to our ability to assert ourselves globally, to the peace and security we enjoy, our economic success, our excellent framework conditions for education and science, and the fundamental rights which underpin democracy. Nevertheless, increasing volatility will require us to exercise still greater coherence, agility and foresight in the years to come. A strategy that sets priorities and identifies goals is therefore a basic prerequisite for us to succeed in safeguarding our interests and promoting our values.



Foto: Monika Flückiger

Foreign policy is derived from the provisions of the Federal Constitution, which were designed for the long term and are based on tried and tested pillars as well as on our country's value tradition. The Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23 is the third such paper to set a framework for the Federal Council's foreign policy. It builds on consistency, trust and tradition and, with new focus areas, provides appropriate instruments for dealing with changing global parameters for this legislative period.

The Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23 was developed as part of an interdepartmental process. It serves as a strategic compass for the Federal Council and the Federal Administration to position our country in the world, while at the same time maintaining the flexibility to respond quickly to change. It aims to ensure that Switzerland is perceived as a credible and coherent actor in foreign policy.

Public dialogue and parliamentary and cantonal involvement are central to a coherent foreign policy. The Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23 was also shaped by direct exchanges with the public during the summer of 2019, discussions with stakeholders from science, business and civil society, as well as regular exchanges with Parliament and the cantons.

On behalf of the Federal Council, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those involved. This dialogue with our citizens is something we would like to continue. We therefore look forward to your participation in shaping a shared, credible and effective foreign policy for Switzerland.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cassis', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ignazio Cassis
Federal Councillor

Strategic compass of foreign policy

The broad outlines of foreign policy are set out in the Federal Constitution. Article 2 is the baseline for defining interests and values; Article 54 lists important aspects of foreign policy. Article 101 complements them by stating that “the Confederation shall safeguard the interests of the Swiss economy abroad”.

Foreign policy is guided by principles enshrined in the Constitution: freedom, the rule of law, equality of opportunity and sustainable development. Regarding implementation, the focus is on universality, multilateralism and neutrality.



Thematic focus area 1:

Peace and security

1

Peace, the rule of law and security are the foundations for prosperity and sustainable development. Switzerland has a fundamental interest in ensuring that peace and security are guaranteed to the greatest possible extent.



During the current legislative period, Switzerland will continue to use the tried and tested instruments at its disposal to achieve this goal.

HOW?

- *Switzerland's election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council – a seat for which it is a candidate for the 2023–24 period – would enable it to contribute to a peaceful international order. Switzerland would thereby be well placed to improve the effectiveness of multilateral bodies and at the same time would benefit from an excellent platform to advance its interests and to increase recognition of its capacity to build bridges.*
- *Peace policy is an area in which Switzerland plays a leading role. Good offices, conflict prevention and resolution, mediation, protection of civilians, promotion of dialogue and democracy, military peace support, scientific diplomacy and the fight against impunity: Swiss expertise is solid and very broad. It responds to a growing demand in a polarised world. Switzerland – which has no hidden political agenda – must raise its profile in this area.*

- *The universality of human rights is a priority that Switzerland will continue to actively defend. It will work in particular within the UN Human Rights Council, as well as within the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, to strengthen the international legal framework on human rights.*

- *Switzerland must build on its humanitarian tradition to become a leading centre of expertise in the humanitarian arena and in efforts to strengthen international humanitarian law. Geneva in particular enjoys the right conditions to allow the development of innovative approaches. Through specific emphasis on new technologies, armed conflict in urban areas or the issue of internally displaced persons, for example, the effectiveness of the humanitarian response can be further increased.*

- *Switzerland's commitment to arms control and disarmament will remain intact. The same applies to the fight against organised crime, cybercrime, terrorism, and human trafficking and people smuggling.*

Thematic focus area 2:

Prosperity

2

As the fragmentation of the world trade order increases, so too do geopolitical tensions. As a medium-sized economic power, Switzerland is dependent on clear and fair rules of competition and market access and a stable financial system.



Prosperity is a virtuous circle. Through targeted international cooperation and sustainable resource management, Switzerland supports this circle by contributing to the development of other countries. In order to be able to do so, it must, by 2023 and beyond, maintain its own prosperity.

HOW?

- *A stable, reliable and rules-based trade, financial and monetary architecture facilitates trade. Foreign policy must help create and maintain a favourable bilateral and multilateral environment to support the Swiss economy. It must also seek to strengthen Swiss access to the EU single market and support the bilateral approach through the signing of an institutional agreement.*
- *Support for export, on which Switzerland's prosperity largely depends, is geared to export companies' needs and the search for efficiencies. The promotion of Swiss companies and trade diplomacy are an integral part of Switzerland's activities abroad.*

- *Education, research and innovation are at the heart of Switzerland's success. We must therefore seek to create the best possible framework conditions going forward, to ensure we maintain our leading position in these areas in the future.*
- *By promoting market access and the creation of new economic opportunities for developing countries, Switzerland, particularly through its international cooperation, assumes its responsibilities to contribute to global prosperity. Support for private sector initiatives, for example in the field of access to capital, integration in the world economy or entrepreneurship to facilitate the creation of decent jobs, is in keeping with this approach.*
- *Switzerland is committed to sustainable resource management and helps to improve equal access to quality basic services.*

Thematic focus area 3:

Sustainability

3

Within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, Switzerland has committed itself to sustainable development that pays equal attention to three dimensions: the environment, the economy and society.



To this end, it has set up the appropriate administrative structures. It also works at national and international levels with all stakeholders to promote environmental protection and sustainability.

HOW?

- *The sustainable use of natural resources and the preservation of biodiversity are key for Switzerland. During the 2020–23 legislative period, Switzerland will therefore strive to establish high standards in areas such as chemicals and waste management, commodities extraction and trading, and infrastructure. Switzerland will also encourage responsible corporate conduct and a sustainable financial sector.*
- *Furthermore, Switzerland will commit itself to the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement, the limitation of global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and the gradual increase of national climate objectives in order to contribute to global efforts. Through Swiss Humanitarian Aid, it will play an active role in disaster risk reduction and reconstruction efforts.*

- Sustainability also means better health outcomes for all. In this respect, Switzerland is especially committed to promoting better protection against health risks wherever possible. It is also working to build national health systems that are able to function effectively and sustainably.
- Protecting endangered cultural heritage is a priority of Switzerland's cultural foreign policy. Promoting diversity is another, for example by supporting Swiss film-making and Swiss schools abroad, and participating in various EU programmes. From 2019 to 2023, Switzerland will also sit on the Executive Board of UNESCO.
- Capitalising further on the potential of cities as foreign policy actors can be achieved through partnerships at home and abroad. Dialogue on sustainability issues can also be enriched by collaboration with city networks or the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

Thematic focus area 4:

Digitalisation

4

Advances in information and communication technologies will have significant political, economic and social implications. It is therefore essential to start developing new approaches now, in order to address the risks and identify the opportunities related to digitalisation and its governance.



Switzerland is at the forefront of innovation in this field. It is well positioned to help define and shape the complex issues raised by the digital governance between now and 2023 and beyond.

HOW?

- *Switzerland can add a digital dimension to its role as a bridge-builder, bringing together all stakeholders, for example to clarify responsibilities in cyberspace or develop new models of digital governance.*
- *The development of a global policy on digitalisation and data use is a challenge that will need to be addressed to ensure access to data and encourage its use in order to further social and economic development. Such a policy must ensure that democratic self-determination, the principles of the rule of law and human rights are respected.*

- Geneva must become the global venue for discussions on the shaping of digital and technology policy. Numerous initiatives are already present, but Switzerland will endeavour to enhance the network by strengthening existing platforms such as the **Geneva Internet Platform**, the **Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator (GESDA)** foundation and the **Geneva Dialogue on Responsible Behaviour in Cyberspace**.
- Working to minimise risks in cyberspace may be one way for Switzerland to burnish its credentials in the field of digital diplomacy. Its expertise in restoring relations of trust between states is already widely recognised. International law and how it applies to cyberspace is also an area in which Switzerland has proven experience which it can contribute to various initiatives.
- Developing countries must benefit fully from new technologies. With that in mind, Switzerland prioritises their use in humanitarian crises and for the prevention of such crises. At the same time, Switzerland acts responsibly, for example by helping the countries concerned to manage the environmental risks associated with the extraction of raw materials for new technologies.

THE THEMATIC FOCUS AREAS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY 2020–23 WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN ALL REGIONS OF THE WORLD AND ALSO MULTILATERALLY.

Europe (EU)

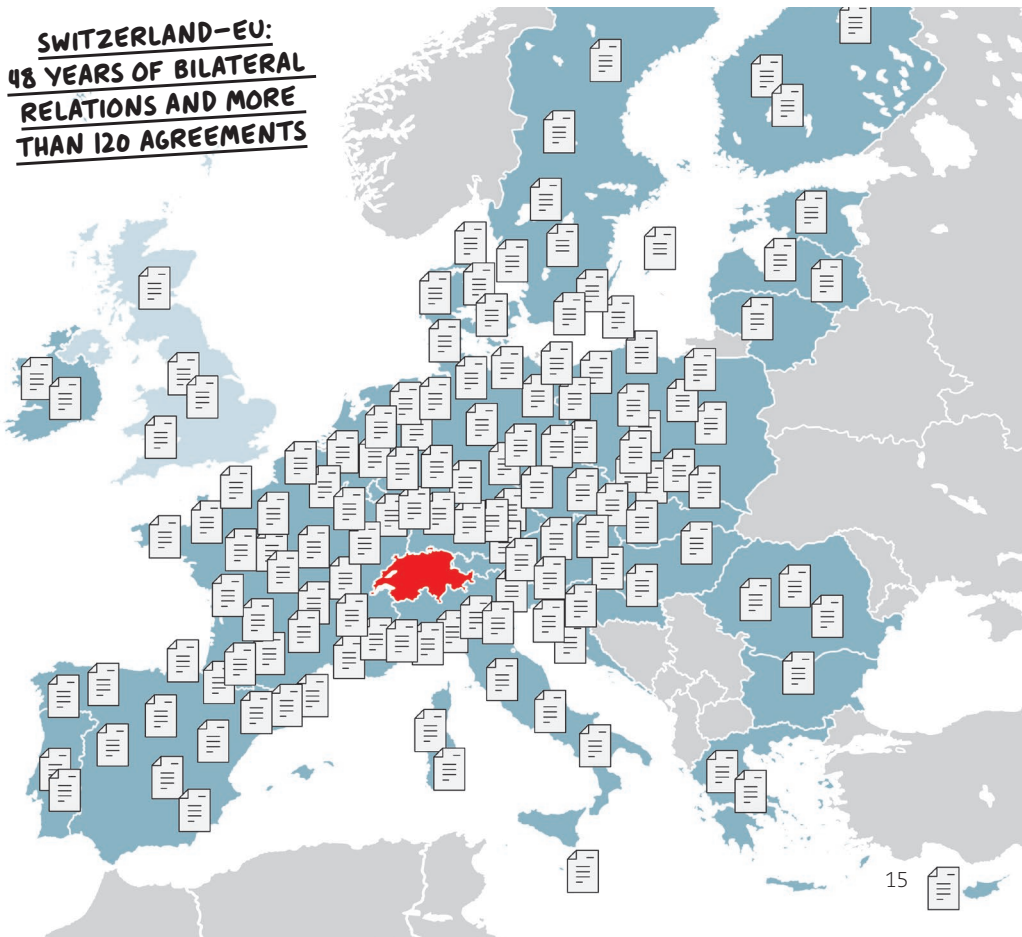
Geographically and culturally, Switzerland is a European country. The safeguarding of its interests around the world starts in Europe. Switzerland cooperates in many sectors with the EU, its individual member states and other European states such as the United Kingdom.

Switzerland's European policy objectives are to continue guaranteeing and further developing extensive access to the EU single market and cooperation with the EU in areas of interest while maintaining the greatest possible political autonomy. For Switzerland, this bilateral path resting on sectoral agreements is a tailor-made approach which defines its relations with the EU.

HOW?

- The conclusion of an institutional agreement will consolidate access to the EU single market and strengthen the bilateral approach in general. Furthermore, it will allow for the further development of this approach through the conclusion of new market access agreements.
- In regard to electricity, food safety and public health, the objective is to conclude the ongoing negotiations. In addition, participation in the EU programmes will continue, particularly in the fields of research and innovation.

**SWITZERLAND-EU:
48 YEARS OF BILATERAL
RELATIONS AND MORE
THAN 120 AGREEMENTS**



- Through its Schengen/Dublin association agreements, Switzerland will safeguard its interests in the fight against crime and irregular migration. In this way, it will also defend its position on border protection at the European level.
- Switzerland aims to strengthen the coherence of its European policy as an overarching strategic measure. Where pertinent, it will examine the various strands of its foreign policy in terms of how they relate to the core Swiss concern of consolidated relations with the EU, create internal coordination instruments and maintain regular dialogue with the EU on all aspects of bilateral cooperation.
- In bilateral relations with individual EU member states, there will be greater coordination between the various dossiers, which will be consistently aligned with the core objectives of EU policy.
- The mutual rights and obligations that currently exist between Switzerland and the United Kingdom will be legally safeguarded as far as possible through the Mind the Gap strategy. Going forward, the bilateral relationship between Switzerland and the UK will be deepened and expanded (Mind the Gap+).

Priority regions and countries

In line with the principle of universality, Switzerland maintains good bilateral relations with all states. Switzerland also works with regional and multilateral organisations as well as global partners.

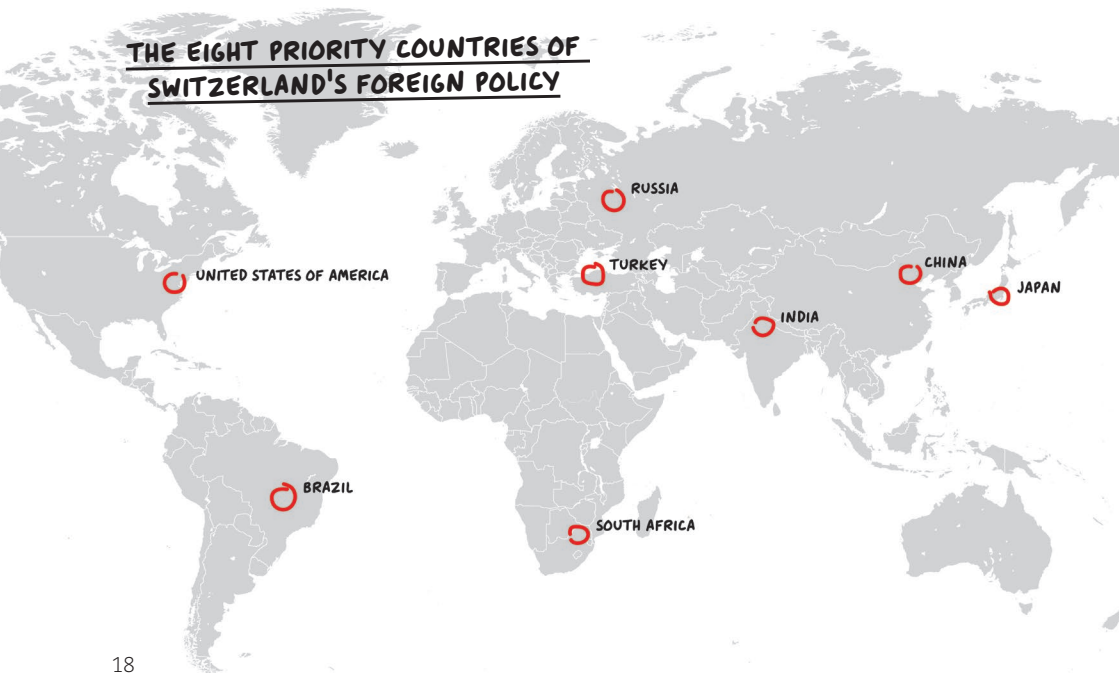
However, against a backdrop increasingly based on power politics and unilateralism, Switzerland must set clear priorities with regard to the most influential political players if it is to defend its interests effectively in the current legislative period. Strategies will be developed to this effect.

HOW?

- *In South-Eastern and Eastern Europe and neighbouring regions: Switzerland intends to continue its policy of critical and constructive dialogue with Russia and Turkey. Providing its good offices in regional conflicts and its assistance to the populations affected by those conflicts also helps strengthen Switzerland's credibility. Its commitment in the region enables it to maintain very good relations with the countries there.*
- *In sub-Saharan Africa: Switzerland intends to expand cooperation with the African Union (AU) and hence strengthen partnerships with individual African countries, also in the context of Switzerland's candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council.*

- In the Middle East and North Africa region: Switzerland's priorities will focus on respect for international law and human rights, with an additional emphasis on economic development and job opportunities for young people. Furthermore, Switzerland will continue to offer its good offices in the region, in particular through protecting power mandates.
- In Asia: With regard to China, coherent action will be ensured through interdepartmental coordination bodies. Within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, Switzerland will work to improve the conditions for Swiss companies to participate in projects while ensuring alignment with the values and objectives of established multilateral organisations and institutions.
- In the Americas: Switzerland will focus on strengthening legal frameworks in different areas (trade, investment, taxation, innovation). With the United States, Switzerland's second largest trading partner, the focus will be on developing economic relations and cooperation in education, innovation and research.

THE EIGHT PRIORITY COUNTRIES OF SWITZERLAND'S FOREIGN POLICY



Multilateralism

Climate change, terrorism, poverty, economic crises and recurring armed conflicts: multilateral collaboration is the only realistic way of addressing such challenges. In recent years, it has enabled the international community to develop global reference frameworks including the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

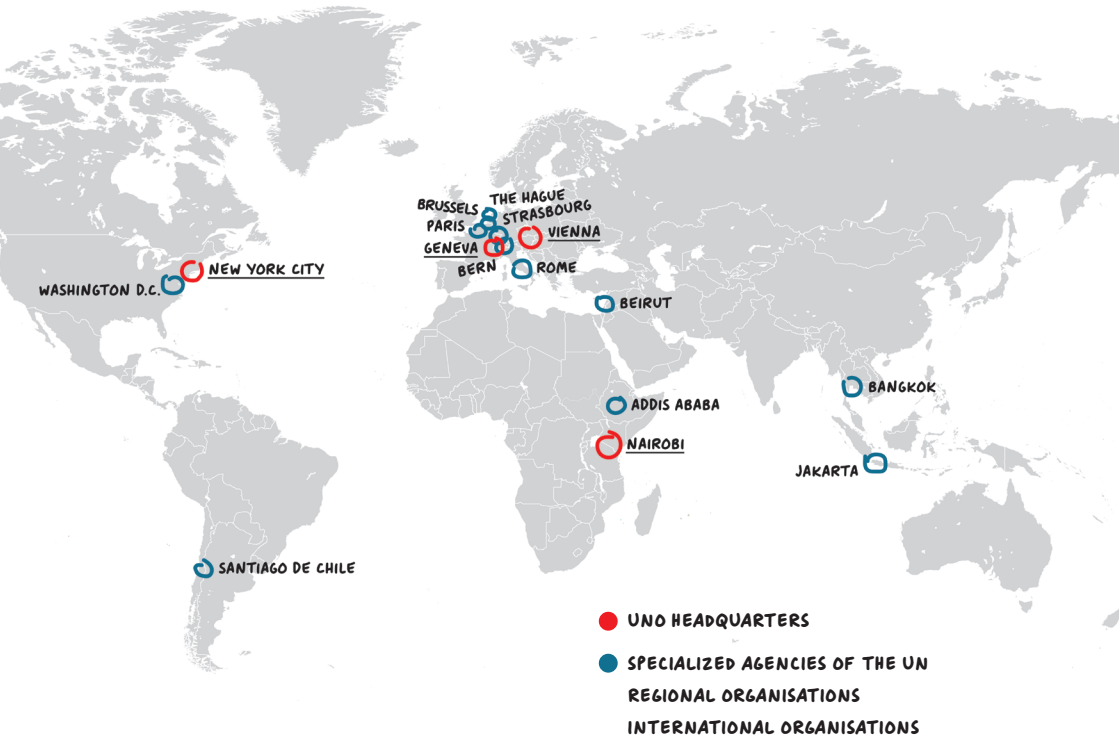
For a country like Switzerland, it is essential to actively build partnerships with international organisations and participate in their work.

HOW?

- *Through its pragmatic and results-oriented approach, Switzerland supports the UN reform efforts. Working in a targeted manner through alliances and focusing on specific issues such as greater accountability and transparency in the working methods of the Security Council, it seeks to bring about genuine progress.*
- *In addition, Switzerland uses its strategic partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to improve respect for international humanitarian law. It is also committed to the effective functioning of the International Criminal Court.*
- *Switzerland's participation in the Finance Track in particular at the G20 Summit in Saudi Arabia in 2020 and in the run-up to the summit will provide the opportunity to contribute and to strengthen relations with the members of this important forum.*

- As a host state, Switzerland is constantly building on its attractiveness and competitiveness. It does this by promoting the universalisation of diplomatic representations on its territory, holding international conferences and peace talks, and ensuring a strong positioning with regard to the challenges of the future.
- By fostering and deepening collaboration with like-minded countries or groups of countries, Switzerland participates in thematic or regional initiatives that have the potential to lead to innovative solutions.

THE POLES OF MULTILATERALISM



External network and its services

Switzerland's external network consists of around 170 representations, where Swiss citizens living abroad, travellers and private companies can count on effective support tailored to local conditions.

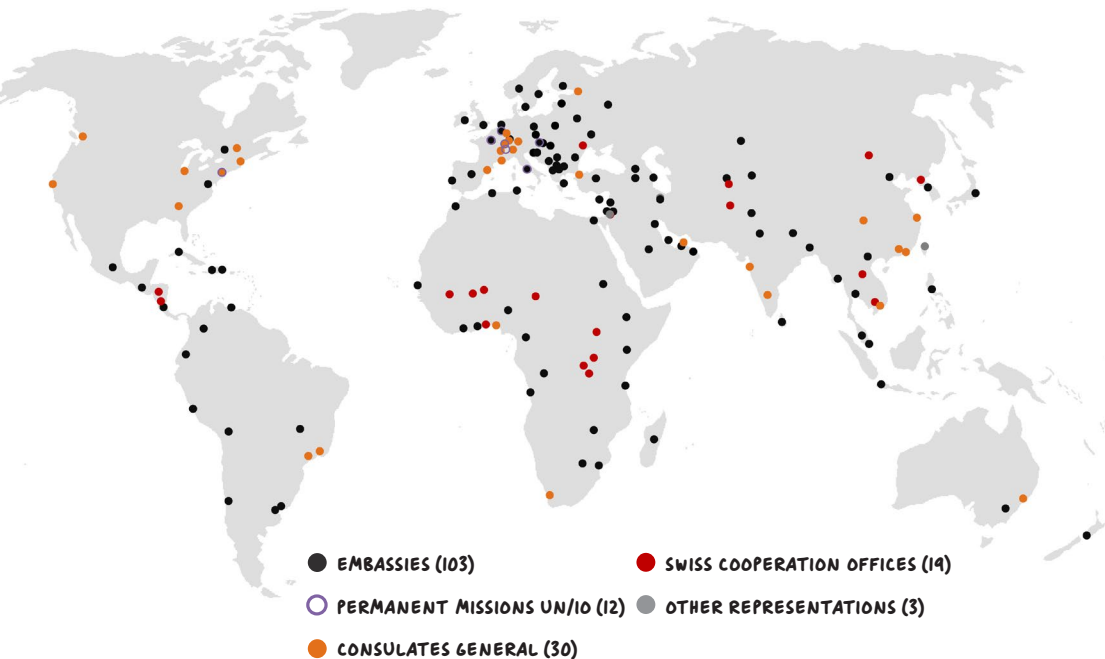
In the years to come, new technologies will drive greater efficiency and closer proximity to citizens or businesses abroad. This prospect will provide an opportunity to roll out the 'One Switzerland' approach.

HOW?

- *Switzerland's foreign policy relies on an effectively organised network of representations abroad. This means a network which is modular, flexible and capable of innovation. By analysing each representation's geographical location and tasks on an ongoing basis, the FDFA is able to react quickly to changing needs. Switzerland's activities related to culture, business, science and other areas are carried out under the motto 'One Switzerland', lending overall coherence.*
- *FDFA personnel working abroad are trained accordingly. The goal, as for the entire Federal Administration personnel, is for them to represent a good cross-section of Swiss society. Continuing education and training is offered to ensure that posts are filled according to the principle of 'the right person for the right job'. Lastly, permeability between careers is being improved.*

- Switzerland adheres to the concept of 'sustainable representations'. It is working to improve its environmental impact through increased videoconferencing, making the best use of its external network and reducing air travel.
- Crisis management capabilities of staff abroad and the security culture are being strengthened. The security of Swiss representations is analysed on an ongoing basis.
- To improve the services provided to citizens, Swiss consular services systematically exploit the possibilities offered by digitalisation. However, every effort is made to ensure that electronic processes are secure and reliable.

SWITZERLAND'S EXTERNAL NETWORK ABROAD



Communication

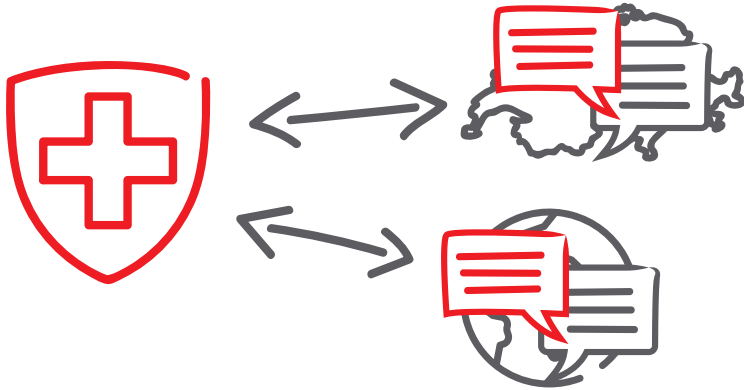
Foreign policy must be supported by Parliament, the cantons and the Swiss people. It must therefore be explained in a clear and comprehensible manner.

At the same time, communication is becoming increasingly important as an instrument of diplomacy. Indeed, the way Switzerland is perceived abroad influences its scope for action. For the Federal Council, it is therefore of great importance that communication plays a strategic role in foreign policy.

HOW?

- *High-quality content designed to inform in a transparent, opportune and proactive manner boosts acceptance of foreign policy at the national level. In addition, coherence between communication at home and abroad must be ensured so that Switzerland's positions and interests are understood beyond its borders.*
- *The potential of social media and new communication channels can be exploited more systematically to meet PR needs in Switzerland and abroad.*
- *The FDFA will continue projects such as Meet the Ambassadors, which took place in the summer of 2019. The aim will remain the same: to discuss foreign policy and diplomacy with the Swiss public.*

- Major international events such as the Olympic Games in 2022 in Tokyo and in Beijing in 2022, Expo 2020 in Dubai and the World Economic Forum are prime showcases for Switzerland and its partners. Experience shows that participation in such events has a positive impact on Switzerland's image abroad, which must be capitalised upon.
- Lastly, certain key themes for the country – such as Swiss-EU relations, the candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, Switzerland as a hub for innovation, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda – will be the subject of broader communication in order to make them understandable to the general public.



Conclusion

Happiness is hard to measure – but it is no accident that Switzerland is among the highest-ranking countries in the **World Happiness Report**. Switzerland is one of the safest, most prosperous countries in the world. Our young people enjoy good prospects. Citizens' trust in their institutions is high by international comparison.

There are many reasons for Switzerland's success story. Foreign policy has its part to play, as do factors such as government institutions that are responsive to citizens, political stability and geography. In seeking a balance between openness and independence, Switzerland has hit on a proven formula that points the way to the future.

The Federal Council's new Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23 also builds on proven formulas. Given the continued fragmentation in world politics, the demand for Switzerland's good offices is likely to remain high. Switzerland's role as a credible, discreet and reliable bridge-builder has a promising future. However, the Federal Council is also using this strategy to further develop foreign policy in areas where there are new challenges to address and opportunities to embrace. Switzerland's digital foreign policy and ambition to position Geneva as a global hub for the shaping of digital governance is one such opportunity.

In its dispatch on the legislative programme for 2019–23, the Federal Council states that Switzerland’s influence abroad will play an even greater role in safeguarding Swiss interests at home in future. The Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23 thus includes for the first time thematic and regional focuses in addition to overall priorities.

Clear foreign policy objectives are one thing. If Switzerland is to continue its success story, it must translate strategy into coherent action. Today, there is virtually no domestic issue that does not also have a strong international dimension. The Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–23 was therefore developed interdepartmentally and is backed by the Federal Council as a whole.

The Federal Council wants to increase the foreign policy involvement of civil society actors outside of the federal institutions and also the cantons. Switzerland’s foreign policy has the greatest impact when it has broad support, based on a ‘whole of Switzerland’ approach.

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