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European policy of Switzerland

The European Union (EU) is the most important partner of Switzerland - politically, culturally and economically. The EU and Switzerland are founded on common fundamental values such as democracy, regard for human rights and a constitutional state. The EU is by far the most important trading partner of Switzerland: three-fifths of our exports are sent to EU countries, while four-fifths of our imports come from there.

Switzerland also has close contractual ties with the European Union. 1972 saw the conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement (for industrial products), while seven bilateral agreements were signed in 1999 in the areas of free movement of persons, overland transport, air transport, agriculture, research, technical barriers to trade and public procurement. These bilateral agreements I came into force on 1 June 2002.

Further negotiations in nine new areas (Bilaterals II) have been concluded on a political level on 19 May 2004.

The European policy of the Federal Council

On 4 March 2001 the people and the cantons overwhelmingly rejected the popular initiative "Yes to Europe!". This initiative was intended to oblige the Federal Council to open immediate negotiations on entry to the EU. Voters heeded the Federal Council's recommendation to reject this popular initiative because the preconditions for the commencement of negotiations on entry to the EU had not yet been met.

The Federal Council reaffirmed the key elements of its European policy after the vote on 4 March 2001:

- In the short term, the implementation of the seven bilateral agreements, their extension to the ten new EU Member States and the conclusion of the second series of negotiations are the top priority.
- In the medium term, priority will be given to obtaining approval of the second series of agreements by the Federal Assembly and the Swiss people and their subsequent implementation.
- The longer term aim of the Federal Council's European policy is to take Switzerland into the

European Union. The Federal Council is convinced that in the long-term our country can better safeguard its interests within the EU than outside it. Today, many problems can no longer be resolved through the lone actions of individual states, but only in acting together at European level.

The question of Switzerland's entry into the EU

In its Foreign Policy Report of 15 November 2000 the Federal Council set out its long-term aim of taking Switzerland into the EU as well as the three preconditions for the commencement of entry negotiations:

Firstly: Switzerland first wishes to gather experience with the seven bilateral agreements from 1999. It wants to see how these agreements work out in practice.

Secondly: The effects of joining the EU on central areas of Swiss statehood must be thoroughly clarified and convincing answers found to any outstanding questions. The Federal Council will publish a report on the pros and cons of EU membership in the second half of this legislative period outlining the consequences for the country's federalism, popular rights, neutrality, system of government organisation, finances, economic and monetary policy, agriculture, migration policy, not to mention its foreign and defence policy.

Thirdly: There needs to be broad domestic support for the aim of EU entry.



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