

Switzerland profile - Timeline

22 May 2018

A chronology of key events:

1291 - Origin of the Swiss confederation when three cantons form an alliance to resist outside control.

1815 - In the wake of the Napoleonic wars, the borders of Switzerland - and the territory's neutrality - are established at the Congress of Vienna.

1848 - Federal constitution defines the political system, providing for a centralised government.

1874 - Revised constitution allows for the exercise of direct democracy by referendum.

1914-18 - Switzerland organises Red Cross units during World War I.

1919-20 - Treaty of Versailles reaffirms Swiss neutrality.

1920 - Joins League of Nations. League's headquarters established in Geneva.

1923 - Customs union with Liechtenstein.

1939-45 - Federal Council issues a declaration of neutrality at start of World War II. Refuses to join United Nations.

Magic formula

1959 - Founder-member of European Free Trade Association (Efta).

Four party government system comes into being in a political agreement know as the "magic formula" which lasts for decades and brings a large measure of political stability.

1963 - Joins Council of Europe.

1967 - Right-wing groups campaign to restrict entry of foreign workers.

1971 - Women granted right to vote in federal elections.

1979 - After referendum, French-speaking part of Bern becomes separate canton of Jura.

1985 - Referendum guarantees women legal equality with men within marriage.

1986 - Referendum opposes UN membership by three to one. Immigrant numbers restricted.

1992 - Switzerland joins World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) but December referendum rejects membership of European Economic Area - a free-trade zone.

1994 - Referendum approves law making racial discrimination and denial of Nazi Holocaust illegal. Laws tightened against drugs traffickers and illegal immigrants.

1995 - Swiss Banking Association announces - after pressure from Jewish groups - it has uncovered dormant pre-1945 bank accounts containing millions of dollars.

1998 August - Swiss banks agree \$1.25bn compensation deal with Holocaust survivors and families.

Right-wing gains

1999 October - General election strengthens right-wing vote. The People's Party (SVP), led by Christoph Blocher, becomes second strongest political force in the country with nearly a quarter of the vote.

2001 March - Voters reject moves to open talks on joining the European Union.

2001 June - Swiss vote narrowly in favour of allowing their soldiers to carry weapons during peacekeeping missions abroad.

2001 September - Parliament votes overwhelmingly in favour of United Nations membership, paving the way for a referendum on the issue.

2001 October - Eleven die as huge fire breaks out after crash in Gotthard tunnel.

2001 December - Voters reject proposal to scrap the army.

2002 January - Bankrupt national carrier Swissair relaunched as Swiss.

2002 March - A narrow majority of Swiss vote in favour of joining the United Nations in a referendum.

Bergier report by independent panel of historians finds that Swiss authorities knew what lay in store for Jewish refugees to whom Swiss borders were closed in 1942. The report also concluded that Switzerland had bolstered the economy of Nazi Germany but not to a degree that prolonged the war.

2002 June - Swiss people vote in referendum to decriminalise abortion which will be allowed in first 12 weeks of pregnancy. A proposal which would have tightened the already strict abortion law is rejected in a separate referendum.

UN membership

2002 September - Switzerland formally becomes a member of the UN.

2002 November - By narrowest of margins, referendum rejects drastic tightening of asylum laws.

2003 May - Nine different issues put to referendum. Swiss vote against abolition of nuclear power, new proposals on rights for the disabled and the introduction of car-free Sundays but in favour of army cuts and changes to civil defence.

2003 October - The right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP) becomes the biggest force in parliament after winning almost 28% of the vote in general elections.

2003 December - Parliament agrees to grant right-wing Swiss People's Party second post in seven-seat government at the expense of the Christian Democrats, altering the "magic formula" which had brought stability to Swiss politics since 1959.

2004 May - Agreement signed with EU on taxing accounts held in Swiss banks by EU taxpayers.

2004 September - Voters in a referendum reject moves to relax strict naturalisation laws. The result is seen as a victory for the right-wing.

2004 November - Referendum votes in favour of allowing scientific research using stem cells taken from human embryos.

Immigration debate

2005 June - Voters in referendum support joining EU Schengen and Dublin agreements and extending rights for same-sex couples.

In the most serious breakdown in Swiss railway history, power failure brings trains to a standstill for several hours.

2005 September - Referendum vote goes in favour of opening job market to workers from the

10 newest European Union countries.

2005 November - Referendum backs five-year ban on use of genetically modified crops.

2006 September - Voters in a national referendum back plans to make their asylum laws among the toughest in the West.

2007 January-May - Ex-directors of Swissair, which collapsed in 2001, are in the dock in Switzerland's biggest corporate trial. They are all cleared.

2007 September - Row over Swiss People's Party's "kick out the black sheep" poster aimed at deporting foreigners who commit crimes.

2007 October - Elections. Swiss People's Party (SVP) boosts its standing as the biggest group in parliament, scooping nearly 29% of the vote.

2007 December - Swiss People's Party (SVP) quits the governing coalition after one of its leaders, Christoph Blocher, is forced from his cabinet seat.

2008 June - Voters reject referendum initiative to limit naturalisation of foreigners by allowing Swiss communes to vote on individual cases.

2008 October - Libya cancels all oil deliveries to Switzerland and withdraws assets worth billions of dollars from Swiss banks in response to the arrest of leader Muammar Gaddafi's son, Hannibal. Mr Gaddafi and his wife were detained for assault but the charges were later dropped.

Switzerland unveils a \$5.3bn rescue plan for its largest bank, UBS, which was badly hit by the global credit crisis.

2008 December - Swiss People's Party (SVP) rejoins the governing coalition with the election of party member Ueli Maurer to the Federal Council.

Switzerland scraps routine passport controls at all its borders after joining the EU's Schengen Agreement.

Recession

2009 January - Swiss economy officially goes into recession.

2009 March - Switzerland's government announces it will relax its rules on banking secrecy to allow Swiss financial institutions to cooperate with international investigations into tax evasion.

2009 September - Swiss economy returns to growth.

2009 November - Swiss voters approve referendum initiative banning the construction of minarets.

2010 September - Election of fourth female minister to seven-member Federal Council gives Swiss cabinet majority of women for first time ever.

2010 November - Swiss voters approve referendum initiative on automatically deporting foreigners who have committed serious crimes.

2011 February - Voters in a referendum reject plans for tighter gun controls.

2011 May - In the wake of the crisis at Japan's Fukushima nuclear plant, Switzerland becomes the first country in Europe to announce plans to phase out nuclear power.

2011 September - The government announces that the Swiss franc is to be pegged to the euro, after Swiss manufacturers warn that the currency's strength is making Swiss exports uncompetitive and risks tipping the country back into recession.

2011 October - Right-wing Swiss People's Party loses ground in parliamentary elections, but remains the largest party.

Immigration debate

2012 April - The government re-imposes immigration quotas on workers from central and eastern European Union countries, through a "safeguard clause" in its agreement with the EU on freedom of movement. The EU criticises the decision.

2012 November - The Ecopop environmentalist group collects enough signatures to force a national referendum to cap annual population growth at 0.2%, by drastically restricting immigration.

2013 June - Lower house of parliament refuses to debate bill to allow banks to pass client information to US tax authorities in pursuit of American tax evaders. US has threatened to deny Swiss banks access to dollar markets unless the country complies.

2013 September - Voters reject a proposal to scrap military conscription.

2014 February - A Swiss People's Party proposal to bring back strict quotas for immigration from European Union countries is narrowly passed in a national referendum, invalidating a Swiss-EU agreement on freedom of movement.

2014 November - Voters reject a proposal backed by the environmentalist pressure group Ecopop for net immigration to be limited to a maximum of 0.2% of the population.

2015 January - The Swiss National Bank responds to the steep depreciation of the euro during 2014 by abruptly terminating the pegging of the franc to the euro introduced in 2011. The move causes the franc to soar and prompts warnings of serious damage to Switzerland's struggling tourism and export sectors.

2016 June - Voters in a referendum reject a proposal to introduce an unconditional basic income.

2017 February - A measure to make it easier for third generation immigrants to become citizens is approved in a referendum.

2017 May - Voters in a referendum approve plans to phase out nuclear energy.

2018 March - Voters in a referendum reject a proposal to abolish the mandatory licence fee for public broadcasting.

Media

Neue Zürcher Zeitung - Zurich-based daily

Tages-Anzeiger - Zurich-based daily

Le Temps - Geneva-based daily

La Tribune de Geneve - daily

Corriere del Ticino - Lugano-based daily

Television

SF-DRS - German-language public broadcaster, operates 3 channels

RTSI - Italian-language public broadcaster, operates 2 channels

TSR - French-language public broadcaster, operates 2 channels

Radio

SR-DRS - German-language public broadcaster, operates 5 stations

RSR - French-language public broadcaster, operates 4 stations

RSI - Italian-language public broadcaster, operates 4 stations

RR - Rumansch-language public radio station

News agency/internet

swissinfo - news portal operated by public broadcaster, pages in English

SDA - Swiss News Agency (SDA/ATS)