



Brief history of Presence Switzerland

Presence Switzerland's predecessor: the Coordinating Commission for the Presence of Switzerland Abroad (COCO)

The origin of COCO can be traced back to the debate in the Swiss Federal Parliament on 27 May 1970, in which the wish was expressed for there to be a reinforcement of the cooperation between state-run and partly-state-run organisations in the interest of Switzerland's presence abroad. Over the decades, there had been no fundamental shifts in the generally excellent image Switzerland had enjoyed abroad. This ideal, which was as good as hewn in stone, became tarnished in countries like Italy and Spain in the course of the disputes over the Schwarzenbach initiatives.

To begin with, the detailed answer to the Federal Parliament's concern came in the form of the "Global Concept for Switzerland's Presence Abroad" of 11 December 1974. This was followed by a Federal Act of Parliament dated 19 March 1976, by means of which the body whose function it was to draw up the above-mentioned global concept was definitively institutionalised.

COCO's tasks were defined as follows:

- The Commission shall draw up a global concept for Switzerland's presence abroad.
- It shall coordinate the measures for general communication abroad.
- It shall be authorised to promote general communication abroad by providing financial support for such measures.
- This shall be without prejudice to the statutory provisions regarding the tasks of the institutions concerned.

The Ordinance adopted by the Federal Council on 20 October 1976 further spelt out that COCO "shall assume the tasks of a Committee for World Exhibitions" and "shall determine priorities by region and by sector".

From the very beginning, the Commission had around twenty members (departments forming part of the federal administration as well as partly state-run and private organisations: Pro Helvetia, OSEC, Switzerland Tourism, SRG, National Science Foundation, Swiss Federation of Commerce and Industry (Vorort), Union of Chambers of Trade, Swiss Bankers Association, Intermundo, Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and Swiss Olympic Association).

The number of employees working for COCO, which was attached to the Secretariat of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, fluctuated between two and five. The financial resources assigned to it rose in stages from an initial CHF 0.63 million to a budget of CHF 2.4 million (in addition to which participation at World Expos was covered by special appropriations on a case-by-case basis, without additional personnel being assigned). Given the modesty of the resources available to it, COCO was never completely able to fulfil the role originally envisaged for it. It soon became clear that, with the appropriations available and a purely rudimentary infrastructure, it would not be able to make any decisive inputs in such a wide-ranging field of activity as Switzerland's presence abroad.

Emergence of Presence Switzerland

Coping with the whole problem of dormant bank assets and, in particular, the massive echo it triggered in the media in the USA, the United Kingdom and Israel, interest in image questions grew sharply from 1996 onwards. The National Council's Committee on Foreign Policy dealt in detail in April 1997 with the subject of "Switzerland's image abroad – *Regards des autres*

et image de soi" and set up an "image" subcommittee to intensify its deliberations still further. In a decision dated 4 November 1997, it adopted a report (97.085) addressed to the National Council, in which it emphasised, *inter alia*, the following points:

"Those bodies which today are already contributing to the dissemination of information about Switzerland and to maintaining Switzerland's presence abroad ought to be the subject of particular attention; this applies to the Coordinating Commission for the Presence of Switzerland Abroad, Swiss Radio International, Swiss schools abroad or other sources of information serving the so-called Fifth Switzerland. In this, special attention is to be paid to the possibilities of communication (television, press, radio, CD-ROMs, internet, and so on) and to establishing exchanges in the university, culture and sports fields (including World Expos)."

This parliamentary appraisal of the situation led to the tabling of various initiatives, including the "re-definition of the mission entrusted to COCO and possibly a reinforcement of that body". This proposal was accepted by the National Council in the form of a parliamentary initiative (98.3002) dated 20 March 1998. It included the following element:

The Federal Council is hereby called on:

- 1. to issue a performance mandate to the Coordinating Commission for the Presence of Switzerland Abroad (COCO) enabling it to carry out coordinated targeted action in those countries where such action is necessary; and*
- 2. to reinforce as appropriate the financial and human resources provided to the COCO Secretariat.*

On 8 September 1999, the Federal Council submitted a policy paper (Message) to the two houses of the Federal Parliament regarding the reorientation and strengthening of COCO, with the aim of implementing parliamentary initiative 98.3002.

Creation of Presence Switzerland and its remit

Presence Switzerland was created by a decision taken by both houses of the Swiss Federal Parliament on 24 March 2000 and was to be a decentralised administrative unit of the Confederation, administratively attached to the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The Act of Parliament and the accompanying Ordinance on the Promotion of Switzerland's Image Abroad came into force on 15 November 2000.

The permanent tasks of Switzerland's communication abroad as laid down in statute are: promoting Switzerland's visibility, explaining Switzerland's political concerns and positions to a foreign public and developing and fostering Switzerland's network of contacts with foreign decision-makers and opinion leaders abroad.

Further developments

After deliberating the Federal Council's policy paper on the financial assistance for Switzerland Tourism for 2005-2009 during their summer and autumn sessions in 2004, the two houses of the Swiss Federal Parliament submitted similarly worded parliamentary initiatives for better coordination of communication abroad. Both houses of the Federal Parliament called on the Federal Council to produce a report including a concept for coordinated communication abroad. In the parliamentary initiative from its Committee on Economic Affairs and Taxation dated 30 March 2004 (04.3199), the Council of States called, in particular, for better focusing of the efforts and money spent by Switzerland Tourism, Presence Switzerland and Location Switzerland. It also called for the new concept to be implemented as speedily as possible, with the FDFA assuming the lead role. In the parliamentary initiative from its Committee on Economic Affairs and Taxation 24 August 2004 (04.3434), the National Council, in turn, called for coordination of all marketing measures receiving state support, be they cultural, political or economic in nature, including measures to promote agricultural production. In this same context, it called for the inclusion of all information and advertising institutions abroad receiving support from the Swiss Confederation in the concept for the global strategic coordination of communication abroad, the deployment of federal resources based on their targets and effectiveness, an organisational streamlining of the tasks,

as well as a clear-cut leadership structure with a clear attachment to a single federal department and subject to its supervision.

By a decision taken on 9 December 2005, the Federal Council adopted and submitted a report on the coordination of communication abroad, proposing a number of variants, including stronger integration with the statutory tasks of federal institutions having a presence abroad. The two houses of the Federal Parliament took note of this report. On 11 May 2006, the National Council adopted a motion and referred it to the second house, envisaging an initial phase consisting in the creation of a society for national advertising and a society for foreign trade and a second phase consisting in the clarification of the possible integration of further organisations. On 19 June 2006, the Council of States rejected the motion referred to it, but in a similar vein to the National Council, called for the speedy drafting of a government proposal in time for the 2007 spring session. After that, the FDFA submitted a proposal dated 11 October 2006 to the Federal Council accompanied by a revised consultation draft for a Federal Act of Parliament on Switzerland's Communication Abroad, envisaging the creation of a new society for communication abroad in which the organisations Switzerland Tourism, Presence Switzerland and Location Switzerland were to be amalgamated. On 24 January 2007, the Federal Council expressed a view opposed to merging Presence Switzerland and Switzerland Tourism in the framework of the coordination of communication abroad as advocated by the Federal Parliament. After that, it took a decision of principle on 28 March 2007, in which it decided to abolish the Coordinating Commission for the Presence of Switzerland Abroad and to integrate its administrative organisation completely into the FDFA, while maintaining its activities. The Federal Act of Parliament of 24 March 2000 needed to be formally amended in this sense. The amendment of this legislation took place in the broader framework of the Federal Council's policy paper of the reorganisation of the extra-parliamentary commissions (07.071), which it adopted on 12 September 2007 and which subsequently was endorsed by the Federal Parliament on 20 March 2008. Through its decision of 12 December 2008, the Federal Council also approved the completely revised Ordinance on the Promotion of Switzerland's Image Abroad (SR 194.11). Both the Act of Parliament of 20 March 2008 and the completely revised Ordinance on the Promotion of Switzerland's Image Abroad came into force on 1 January 2009. Another measure also adopted by the Federal Council on 12 December 2008 was the 2010-2011 Strategy for Communication Abroad.

On the occasion of the coming into force of the new statutory bases on 1 January 2009, the Federal Council assigned new tasks to the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs – to Presence Switzerland to be precise – in the matters of threats and crises affecting the national image. If there is a serious threat to Switzerland's reputation abroad or if an image crisis has already occurred, it is the job of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs to submit a communication concept to the Federal Council. As a basis for this, Presence Switzerland, working in cooperation with the Swiss representations abroad, has intensified the monitoring and analysis of foreign-media reporting about Switzerland and topics of relevance to Switzerland (issues monitoring).

The new statutory basis also specifies that Switzerland's official presence at World Expos and Olympic Games is to be financed through extraordinary contributions from the Confederation.

On 1 June 2012, the Federal Council approved the 2012-2015 Strategy for Communication Abroad. One particularly noteworthy point in this is the paradigm shift when it comes to setting strategic targets: whereas the Coordinating Commission for the Presence of Switzerland Abroad or, (from 2010 onwards) the Federal Council, had defined geographic targets and priorities from 2001 to 2011 and the thematic targets subsequently derived from them, the 2012-2015 Strategy for Communication Abroad now begins by prioritising themes, within the framework of which geographic priorities are then derived.

Presence Switzerland's resources

The Federal Council's policy paper on the reorientation and reinforcement of the Coordinating Commission for the Presence of Switzerland Abroad (COCO) of 8 September 1999 envisaged a steady increase in Presence Switzerland's annual expenditure over the years

2000-2003, from CHF 7.5 million (2000) to CHF 13.8 million (2003). In reality, it later proved impossible to fully reach this budgetary target. The Presence Switzerland budget reached a peak of CHF 12.5 million in 2002 (having exhausted its entire budget appropriation). In the years that followed, the annual budget was continuously reduced in the context of the Confederation's budgetary reductions and plans to withdraw from certain items of expenditure. The outcome of all this is that Presence Switzerland's annual budget at the time of writing, in 2012, has declined to a figure of approximately CHF 7 million. Following the merger within the FDFA, halfway through 2012, of Presence Switzerland and the Cultural Foreign Policy Centre (CCC) and the unification of the budgets of the two institutions, it is likely that Presence Switzerland's annual budget will climb again to reach some CHF 8.5 million in 2012. This sum does not include the appropriations for Switzerland's official presence at World Expos and Olympic Games, since these are financed through extraordinary contributions from the Confederation.

Following the merger of Presence Switzerland with the CCC, the organisation's personnel headcount in September 2012 stands at 45 individuals (38.60 FTEs), of whom eleven occupy fixed-term posts financed out of extraordinary contributions from the Confederation for Switzerland's official presence at major international events.