

Avosetta Meeting – Copenhagen

Recent Developments in Switzerland

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New Nuclear Power Stations?

One of the current debates in Switzerland concerns the approach to **nuclear power**. Following the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the Federal Council decided in 2011 and the Parliament in 2016 to phase out nuclear power (Art. 12a of the Nuclear Energy Act).

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Consequently, no new licences will be granted for the construction or operation of nuclear power stations. Existing nuclear power stations must be decommissioned by the end of their respective safety-related operating lifetimes. Of the five existing reactors, one was decommissioned in 2019, and the remaining four are expected to operate well into the 2030s. According to a recent Federal Council report, even **extending the operating life of three of the plants to 80 years** is technically feasible and economically viable. Until now, an operating life of 60 years was considered feasible.

The **popular initiative** 'Power for everyone, all the time (Stop the blackout)', submitted in 2024, demands that all climate-friendly methods of generating electricity be permitted. This indirectly calls for the ban on building new nuclear power stations to be lifted. Having changed its mind since the 2011 decision, the Federal Council has supported this demand and drafted an indirect counter-proposal that would reverse the nuclear phase-out at the legislative level. The bill is currently being debated in Parliament and has already been approved by the Council of States. If it is also passed by the National Council, a referendum is likely to be called, leading to a popular vote.

PFAS

Several groups of PFAS relevant to human health and the environment, namely long-chain PFOS, PFHxS, PFOA and PFNA, as well as other long-chain perfluorocarboxylic acids (PFCA) and their respective precursor compounds, have been **banned** under the Chemicals Risk Reduction Ordinance for several years. In addition, a restriction on perfluorohexanoic acid (PFHxA) and its precursor compounds came into effect on 1 December 2025. In this respect, Switzerland has closely followed EU regulations.

With the new PFAS parameters for drinking water having become mandatory for Member States under the recast of the **Drinking Water Directive** on 12 January 2026, the question arises as to whether Switzerland will follow suit. Switzerland has already established limit values for three substances in the PFAS group (PFOS, PFHxS and PFOA) in drinking water. Switzerland originally also planned to introduce a maximum limit of 0.1 µg/l for the sum of 20 PFAS in drinking water, as set out in the Drinking Water Directive.

However, in a legislative motion, the Environment Committee of the Council of States is calling for Switzerland to **set its own PFAS limits for drinking water**, independently of the EU. The motion also addresses providing support to agricultural businesses if their products exceed the maximum PFAS levels. This motion has been approved in principle by both the Council of States and the National Council. According to the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO), these ongoing political discussions mean that the PFAS limits for drinking water will currently not be adjusted.

Climate Lawsuit against Holcim

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Four residents of the **small Indonesian island of Pari** have brought a lawsuit against **Holcim**, one of the world's largest cement manufacturers, before the Zug Cantonal Court. The plaintiffs hold the cement company partly responsible for climate change, which threatens the survival of Pari due to rising sea levels. According to the claim, Holcim must **reduce its emissions** more quickly than previously planned and **cover some of the costs** caused by global warming on Pari. Holcim, on the other hand, believes that the courts are not the appropriate venue for addressing climate change and that it is up to policymakers to determine how much CO₂ can be emitted.

In its decision of December 2025, the Zug Cantonal Court ruled that the lawsuit filed by the four residents was **admissible**. The judges explicitly emphasised that court decisions do not replace democratically legitimised climate policy, but rather complement it. In this case, the issue is not Swiss climate policy, but rather the specific demands of the residents of a small island.

The **next level of jurisdiction** is the Zug Higher Court, after which the plaintiffs may appeal to the Federal Supreme Court, and possibly later to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg. If the lawsuit is finally upheld by the Federal Supreme Court, the question of whether Holcim must pay and tighten its CO₂ emissions measures could be addressed.