

talking points.

The FDFA's take on current events



Dear reader

Since the last edition of this newsletter, three issues have been at the forefront of the FDFA's concerns. These will come as no surprise to you.

First, the situation in the **Middle East**. Every Day, news from this region shocks, questions and challenges diplomacy. This prompts us to analyse the situation, activate diplomatic channels, take an official position and act. This was demonstrated once again during Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis's [visit](#) to the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel on 10 and 11 June. We must also not forget the other crises currently unfolding, some of which receive less media coverage. We have taken the pulse of the situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which you can read about below.

The extremely tense global geopolitical situation brings us to our second issue: relations between **Switzerland and the EU**. The Federal Council reaffirmed on 13 June, when he approved the agreements with the EU, that stable and predictable relations with the EU are a "strategic necessity", both because of the importance of our bilateral relations with the EU and in view of the international geopolitical situation. This decision is a very important step in the Swiss-EU dossier. Switzerland's ambassador to the EU, Rita Adam, takes a closer look.

From bilateral to multilateral: the third issue concerns **International Geneva**. The Federal Council has decided to allocate over a quarter of a billion Swiss francs to strengthen this global centre of multilateral diplomacy. This exceptional financial decision is commensurate with the challenges facing Geneva and the multilateral system. The 'Let's Get to the Point' section contains a detailed explanation of the history of International Geneva and its development over the years.

We hope you enjoy this edition!

Nicolas Bideau
Head of FDFA Communication

let's get to the point.

International Geneva



The building and its flag-lined entrance in this photo have become the physical symbol of International Geneva, one of the world's leading centres of **multilateral diplomacy**. On 20 June, the Federal Council announced a support package worth CHF 269 million to strengthen this ecosystem. In addition to approving a set of urgent measures, it adopted a new host state dispatch for the period of 2026–29. This decision by the Swiss government is in response to the financial difficulties faced by international organisations and the increasing competition between states to host them. You will find a full explanation of these decisions [here](#) and in [this video](#).

That's the latest news on International Geneva. Now, let's look at its origin story.

At the risk of stating the obvious, here is a quick refresher on what 'International Geneva' means. International Geneva is a collective term for the international organisations, state representations, NGOs, scientific, academic and civil society actors based in the city and canton of Geneva. You might be surprised by just how many of them there are.

Just look at the [numbers](#): Geneva is currently home to more than 40 **international organisations**, the representations of 183 UN member states, hundreds of NGOs, leading academic and research institutions and a dynamic private sector. On top of this, it hosts over 4,000 visits from heads of state and government, ministers and other dignitaries every year.

Like Rome, International Geneva was not built in a day. How, then, did it become a global hub of multilateralism with the highest density of international actors in the world? In the second volume of *La Suisse et la construction du multilatéralisme* ([dodis.ch/q14](#)), historians Sacha Zala and Marc Perrenoud explain that "Switzerland has been **instrumental** in the construction of multilateralism since the second half of the 19th century". It began with the founding of the Red Cross in Geneva in 1863, swiftly followed by the choice of Bern as the headquarters of the newly established International Telecommunication Union (1865) and the Universal Postal Union (1874).

For Geneva, the period immediately after the end of the First World War proved to be a turning point. Thanks largely to the combined efforts of two Swiss men, Gustav Ador, a member of the Swiss government and former ICRC president, and William E. Rappard, a Geneva-based professor, in 1920 the lakeside city saw off its main rival Brussels to become the headquarters of the **League of Nations**, the forerunner of the United Nations. This new body was the first of its kind to apply an institutional approach to international affairs.

Another key figure from this period was **Giuseppe Motta**. The federal councillor from Ticino was the chief architect of Swiss foreign policy during the interwar years (1920–40).



According to Bénédict de Tscherner's biography *Giuseppe Motta, Homme d'Etat suisse*, the politician began working on Switzerland's membership of the League of Nations almost immediately after he was appointed head of the Federal Political Department, now the FDFA. The **popular vote** of 16 June 1920 on Swiss accession passed, albeit by the narrowest of margins. As de Tscherner points out, this was the first time that the Swiss population and the cantons had been asked to vote on an important foreign policy matter.

Six months later, Giuseppe Motta opened the first session of the League of Nations Assembly, declaring "The day on which the League of Nations came into existence is an event the effects of which will forever have a bearing on the evolution of States. The obvious shortcomings and inevitable imperfections of the first Pact cannot alter this assessment in any way. **The actions of the sower are never entirely fruitless.**" ([dodis.ch/44642](#))

More than 25 years on from Motta's speech, tensions between the great powers and the departure of certain states from its council had left the League of Nations weakened. It would ultimately disband. The image below captures the final session of the League of Nations Assembly held in April 1946 in the Palais des Nations.



That same year, the **UN** took the League of Nations' place on the world stage. Historians Sacha Zala and Flurina Felix note in their introduction to the third volume of *La Suisse et la construction du multilatéralisme* that the Federal Council was hoping the new organisation would make the Palais des Nations its European headquarters regardless of whether Switzerland joined the UN or not ([dodis.ch/q15](#)).

In 1946 these hopes were realised when Switzerland and the UN signed two documents: the Provisional Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations and the Agreement on the Ariana Site ([dodis.ch/1800](#)). However, Swiss membership of the UN would have to wait until 2002.

These are the defining events which put Geneva on the global map. It is precisely this status which the measures announced by the Federal Council at the end of last week seek to **preserve and consolidate**.