

## Text for Lobbying from Swiss Perspective

Dominique Reber <dominique.reber@konsulenten.ch>

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To: dmeier@miller-meier.de <dmeier@miller-meier.de>; pieter.walraven@fipra.com  
<pieter.walraven@fipra.com>; CEO MCPublicAffairs <ceo@mcpublicaffairs.com>; Kevin Komočar  
<kevin@mcpublicaffairs.com>

Dear friends,

please find below my text on lobbying in Switzerland. Is this ok? Too much, too detailed? Too long?

Please do let me know.... I will use it for the presentation ....

Ok?

Regards

Dom

### Lobbying in Switzerland

Switzerland is particular - it's a direct democratic federalist democratie with a part-time parliament.

Lobbying has a tradition in the Swiss context - it is absolutely key and core to the success of Switzerland, a small country, based on farmers that have tough heads and do not give away their freedom without compensation. The main driver in Swiss democratie is and will always be the question of the citizen: If I say yes, what's in it for me and my future.

In the next minutes, I am going to give you a brief overview about these fundamentals and also the effect that Corona had on the Swiss democratic system and the lobbying.

Switzerland is constituted by 26 cantons and 2200 municipalities. They delegate political power to the next level but only if there is a need. It is true that f.i. income taxation differs from municipality to municipality and canton to canton. The differences are huge: Between Berne, Zurich and Zug, income taxes can be more than half.

Decisions are taken at the lowest level in the federalist system always and if possible - this is a safeguard for stability and involvement of the citizens. If they are involved, they care. So all citizens are lobbyists by default as four times per year they vote on municipal, cantonal and federal level and take decisions on issues like local school taxes, local budgets, cantonal investments in road, rail, national data protection etc. In order to win, they try to convince family, friends and neighbours to support their view. The citizens are used to debate these issues and to vote. They are used to accepting that if they do not involve themselves, they will just be ruled by the others that are more active.

Obviously, no citizen can know everything about anything and everyone always feels that actually the know-how to make a decision is lacking. How can a country still be functional under such circumstances of a permanent debate? The most important factor is time: In order to assure that political decisions can be taken

by bringing in all stakeholders, the revision of a national law takes between 36 and 48 months. The strategy for energy policy that was renewed after Fukushima created a debate that lasted for 6 years before a final law was enacted. 282 organizations were involved and gave written input even before the debate in the parliament was launched, let alone the fierce public debate during the referendum. The second most important factor is accepting that others are more expert - so in order to shape an opinion, it is important to listen to those that seem plausible to be best informed.

The positive side effect of this system is an unrivaled stability and quality of the outcome. Switzerland can't run fast but Switzerland does not have to repair too many errors as all powerful lobbies are part of the process. For Switzerland, a major risk lies in moving too fast and to forget or not consider a relevant and important lobby - in the end, such relevant lobbies can always raise a referendum and block a law for 9-12 months or even stop it after years of work. Relevant doesn't mean rich btw. The richest lobby being the labour unions and the environmentalists - they do not win, except if they have strong and convincing arguments.

From the perspective of politicians, this system is often a challenge. Leadership is difficult, changes need a lot of persistence, the brilliant ideas from the ivory tower never make it as there is often too much opposition - so never expect bold answers or strong moves led by politicians in CH. On the contrary, Swiss citizens and also politicians don't see themselves as leaders but more as servants. They want to profile themselves having secured the success of the country and not having put success at risk. They see themselves as defenders of liberties or as defenders of social coherence. So the policy shaping on a national level becomes a defensive act.

Lobbyists are brought into the process by default, they are culturally present. They secure that all opinions are being heard and considered. They appear in the form of associations, companies, NGOs. The strongest being UNIA (a labour union), WWF, industry associations, PRO Natura, the big retail companies, banks, insurance companies etc.

Now one last word on Corona: The Corona crisis was a huge challenge for the Swiss system. Government had to act without having consulted the population. In fact, the national government was not even responsible for the main time of the crisis, the decision makers were in the cantons and they had to coordinate their views and actions. All actions undertaken were then, because this is foreseen by the constitution, framed into a national law on COVID that was brought into the normal parliamentary process and this law was 2 times challenged with a national referendum financed by strong individuals and lobbies that were in opposition to the government.

For me, as a professional lobbyist, this was a moment of truth: Is a direct-democratic country ready to face such an emotional decision? What will be the outcome? Will the population ratify all the means and all the money that was involved? And actually, the Swiss population decided in favor of the government with around 60% and in the second vote even 62% of support for the government. Don't get me wrong: 38 percent of the population decided to refuse, but this is also like cooking under pressure: Once you release the steam, the situation is cooling down. This is actually happening. The most important decision by the Swiss government and parliament during the crisis was exactly to not try to stop or change the political decision making process but to run the risk of the normal popular vote. Citizens felt the responsibility that they have in such a difficult decision and in the end this led to a strengthening of the solidarity. Let me close on one special vote that was not so much reported upon internationally: the healthcare personnel undertook a popular initiative like always, this is aiming at changing the constitution in favor of better working conditions. Federal council and Parliament prepared a draft law project that would have also better the situation - but the Swiss population didn't accept this proposal as the feeling was that it is not good enough. Federal Council and Parliament as well as all political parties lost this case, nurses and care staff won. A clear message of solidarity in difficult times. Now Switzerland's constitution will have an article on care personnel - and as Switzerland has no constitutional

court , this will be part of the history of the country closely linked to the corona pandemic. Children in 30 years will learn about this in school.

The particular Swiss situation and the culturally and legally enshrined lobbying is in my view a heritage that also helps Swiss to take on international mandates - aware of cultural differences, aware of securing that all stakeholders are heard and respected, we are a small but still influential nation also in the international context. The swiss politicians that defined this special role was Max Petitpierre in and after World War 2: "neutrality, solidarity and universality" a motto that is still very much helpful in a globalized and diverse world.