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CONTRIBUTION

by

**Mr Philippe SCHWAB
Secretary General of the Swiss Federal Assembly**

to the General Debate on

**“The relationship between the academic world and
parliaments”**

**Geneva
March 2024**

To understand the relationship between the academic world and the Swiss parliament, we must first look at the main traits of the institutional setup. As you may know, the Swiss parliament is a “part-time parliament”. The general premise is that Swiss MPs continue to exercise their professions alongside their parliamentary careers in a part-time manner. MPs generally come from a wide range of professional backgrounds and so bring their practical expertise to the policy-making process. Switzerland takes pride in the fact that its system is efficient and cost-effective by foregoing an extended bureaucracy. In the logic of the Swiss system, representatives of the academic world should be elected as official members of parliament and bring their specialist knowledge to the policy-making process. In the past, this was often the case, typically with law professors. However, in recent years we have seen a shift towards a greater degree of professionalisation with MPs dedicating become more and more “full-time” politicians and there are fewer representatives of the academic world who hold a political office at the national level.

As this shift continues, the parliament administration’s institutional links to the academic world in the policy-making process are less developed than in other parliaments (e.g. UK [[Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology \(POST\)](#)], [[House of Commons Library](#)], EU [[think tank](#)], Germany [[analyses](#)], Austria [[specialist information](#)]). As such, the Swiss Parliament does not have a comparable in-house research unit or in-house think tanks. Nonetheless, it does have a number of possibilities to draw on scientific expertise when deliberating on draft legislation. These include:

Hearings: before deliberating on major legal drafts, committees hear representatives of interest groups as well as leading scientists. Usually, it is the committee secretariats or the committee members who suggest these representatives. They are chosen according to their expertise regardless of the institution they represent.

Research mandates: the committees and delegations have a budget at their disposal to commission external research (mostly in the form of legal opinions).

The Parliamentary Control of the Administration (PCA) unit. The PCA is the evaluation service of the Federal Assembly. It mainly conducts studies on behalf of the supervisory committees on the legality, expediency and effectiveness of the activities of the government authorities. However, it can also scrutinise the effectiveness of federal government measures on behalf of other parliamentary committees when commissioned to do so.

In the pre-parliamentary phase, the Swiss system has **well-established consultation proceedings**. Interested parties, including the academic world, are invited to comment on planned legislative proposals. In addition, the government generally also consults representatives of the academic community when drafting legislation.

Parliamentary postulates are another instrument available to MPs for requesting the government to conduct, or rather commission research on certain topics.

At the parliamentary administration level, we should mention the cooperation with the **Scientific Political Scholarship Foundation**. Since 2002, two scholarships have been awarded annually to young academics. The individuals in question work at the parliamentary services for a year, usually in one or more committee secretariats.

Swiss academic institutions have formed networks to ensure that scientific findings can flow into the policy-making process. This includes for instance the [swiss academies of arts and sciences](#), which regularly publish policy briefs and statements on various topics. Outside the academic community, think tanks, forums and associations, as well as private research institutions also act as policy advisers. The lines between academic and non-academic

research are often blurred, depending on the subject area. There are a large number of informal forums for exchange between scientists and politicians, such as the [Franxini Hive](#) run by the Reatch! academic think tank, the [Geneva Science Policy Interface](#) supported by a number of universities and research institutions, and the [Think Tank Hub](#) run by the Foreign Policy Forum. There is also the [Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator](#) supported by the Canton and City of Geneva and the Swiss Confederation, for international policy and research cooperation on global issues of the future, and for exchanges between science, politics and diplomacy. MPs can also participate in training seminars with academic experts which are organised by universities, such as the [Swiss School of Public Governance](#).

Some topics are better suited for the cooperation of science and politics: especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, statements made by scientific experts were increasingly taken into consideration in political decision-making (e.g. in task forces or advisory bodies). There are also repeated calls for closer cooperation between science and politics on climate change issues; for example, the "Climate Dialogue" took place in 2022. Around thirty scientists from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) met with members of parliament to discuss possible solutions to the climate crisis.

On a positive note, the Swiss parliament recently decided to **increase the resources of the committee secretariats**, in particular to ensure that they could provide the committees with more substantive support on draft legislation. Here too, it could be sensible for the parliamentary administration to act as a bridge to the academic community and to present the latest research / scientific findings to the committees in a way that is suitable for the audience of policy-makers.

To sum up,

- 1) If the Swiss parliamentary administration's own research activities are less pronounced than in other countries, this is rooted in the specific institutional setup of the Swiss parliament and the basic idea that MPs themselves serve as a source of specialist knowledge due to their professional background.
- 2) The Swiss policy-making process is highly dependent on input from interest groups, such as civil society organisations or economic sectors. The mechanisms for including these groups, particularly in the pre-parliamentary phase, are well developed and respect the principles of evidence-based policymaking. In this regard, the academic world is treated in a similar way as other interest groups.
- 3) In the parliamentary phase, widespread use is made of hearings and external expert opinions are commissioned to appraise major pieces of draft legislation.