

The host State policy

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Switzerland, together with the canton and the city of Geneva, pursues a host State policy intended to maintain and develop International Geneva. This policy comprises the granting of privileges and immunities, the provision of land and buildings, loans for the construction and renovation of headquarters, facilities for the staff of the organisations and missions, support for conferences and financial contributions.¹ The Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office presents International Geneva as a precious instrument and a platform of the first importance for Swiss foreign policy.²

This policy has a cost, which Swiss and Geneva taxpayers bear, and economic benefits, which the statistics cited above measure. It is the subject of political debate between those who see it as an investment indispensable to Switzerland's international standing and those who contest its cost or the privileges granted to international officials.

The renovation of the Palais des Nations, undertaken during the 2010s with partial financing from Switzerland in the form of loans, illustrates the scale of this commitment.³ The construction and renovation of the headquarters of other organisations, often financed by loans from the Confederation repayable over several decades, make the Swiss State a creditor of International Geneva.

For the financial centre, the host State policy creates a favourable environment: infrastructure, accessibility, the presence of an international community, the image of the city. It also creates implicit obligations, since Switzerland's reputation as a host State would be damaged by large-scale financial scandals. Consistency between Geneva's international vocation and the practices of its financial centre is a shared interest.

1 Notes

1. FDFA, “Loi sur l’État hôte” (Host State Act) (eda.admin.ch): Act of 22 June 2007 (SR 192.12), in force on 1 January 2008, governing “privileges, immunities and facilities” as well as “financial subsidies”, Host State Ordinance (OLEH) of 7 December 2007; Ville de Genève, “FIPOI”: foundation created in 1964 by the Confederation and the canton to build, manage and finance the buildings of the international organisations. ↩
2. Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office at Geneva, cited above. ↩
3. République et canton de Genève, “Inauguration de l’extension du Palais des Nations” (ge.ch, 1 November 2021): Strategic Heritage Plan of “837 million Swiss francs over ten years”, loan from the Confederation of CHF 400 million granted in September 2015, cantonal loan of CHF 60 million; swissinfo.ch, “La métamorphose de la Genève internationale prend forme”: total cost of CHF 836.5 million, “half of which is financed by interest-free loans” (CHF 292 million from the Confederation, CHF 108 million from the local authorities), works from 2017 to 2023. ↩

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