

Chronology 1914–1989: the rise of the third financial centre

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

This part of the chronology of Lugano and Ticino as a financial centre covers 94 entries. Each entry names the chapter of the book in which the event is discussed.

Date	Event
1914–1945	
10 January 1914	The Credito Ticinese closes. It is declared bankrupt on 17 January, and the Banca Cantonale Ticinese and the Banca Popolare Ticinese also fail, with savers' losses of more than CHF 30 million. (Chapter C.IV)
19–20 January 1914	The Grand Council adopts the decree that leads to a State bank. Federal and SNB representatives hold a crisis meeting in Bern. (Chapter C.IV)
August 1914	Switzerland mobilizes and declares neutrality. Tourism in Lugano and Locarno collapses. (Chapter D.I)
May 1915	Italy enters the First World War, turning Ticino's southern frontier into the edge of a belligerent state. (Chapter D.I)
6 May 1915	Law establishing the Banca dello Stato del Cantone Ticino, a public- law institution with full State guarantee. (Chapter C.IV)
16 February 1916	The board of the Swiss Federal Railways decides to electrify the Gotthard line. (Chapter C.III)
1918	Swiss voters approve proportional elections for the National Council (66.8 per cent). The first such elections follow in October 1919. (Chapter C.I)

Chronology 1914–1989: the rise of the third financial centre

Date	Event
July 1918	General strike in Lugano led by Guglielmo Canevascini, ahead of the national general strike of November 1918. (Chapter D.I)
1919	The Credito Italiano founds the Banca Unione di Credito in Lugano and the Banca di Roma opens a Lugano branch, giving Italian banking groups a foothold in the town. (Chapter D.I)
1920	The Union Bank of Switzerland absorbs the Banca Svizzera Americana and opens in Locarno and Lugano. The Associazione Bancaria Ticinese is founded. The SNB agency in Bellinzona reopens under the Banca dello Stato (15 April). (Chapter C.IV)
30 January 1921	Voters introduce the optional referendum on international treaties (71.4 per cent), a reaction to the Gotthard Convention. (Chapter C.III)
May 1921	The first Fascist group on Swiss soil is founded in Lugano. In June Mussolini calls the Gotthard "the natural and safe frontier of Italy". (Chapter D.I)
1922	Guglielmo Canevascini becomes the first socialist member of the cantonal government (until 1959). (Chapter D.I)
25 November 1923	The Centovalli railway from Locarno to Domodossola opens. (Chapter C.IV)
1925	A free port (<i>punto franco</i>) opens in Chiasso. (Chapter C.III)
18 August 1926	Mussolini's Pesaro speech announces <i>quota 90</i> . By June 1927 the pound falls to 88.09 lire, briefly reducing the incentive to hold savings abroad. (Chapter D.I)
1927–1933	Randolfo Pacciardi runs an anti-fascist centre in Lugano until his expulsion by the federal authorities. (Chapter D.I)
11 July 1930	Giovanni Bassanesi's anti-fascist leaflet flight from Ticino. The Federal Criminal Court in Lugano convicts only him (22 November 1930). (Chapter D.I)
1931–1933	The collapse of the Banque de Genève and the rescue of the Swiss Volksbank with CHF 100 million of federal money make federal banking legislation unavoidable. (Chapter C.IV)

Date	Event
1931–1932	Italian-language Swiss radio is founded and broadcasts from Monte Ceneri. Television (TSI) follows in 1961. (Chapter J.I)
27 October 1932	French police seize client records of the Basler Handelsbank in Paris. Names of French tax evaders are read out in the Chamber on 8 November. (Chapter D.I)
25 January 1934	The Federazione fascista ticinese fails in its "march on Bellinzona". (Chapter D.I)
8 November 1934	Federal Banking Act: Article 47 makes the breach of banking secrecy a criminal offence. The act enters into force on 1 March 1935 and creates the Federal Banking Commission. (Chapters C.IV, D.I)
December 1934	Italy establishes a State monopoly of foreign exchange and penalizes undeclared assets abroad. (Chapter D.I)
1935	The Federal Council suppresses <i>L'Adula</i> , published since 4 July 1912, whose last issue appears on 3 August 1935. Although the investigation finds no grounds to proceed, the case leads to provisions in the Criminal Code of 1937 against attacks on Swiss independence. (Chapter D.I)
20 February 1938	People and cantons approve, by 91.6 per cent, the language amendment that recognizes Romansh as a national language and defines Italian as an official language of the Confederation. (Chapter J.I)
October 1938	After negotiations with Switzerland, Germany marks the passports of German Jews with a "J" stamp. (Chapter D.I)
30 November 1938	Mussolini tells the Fascist Grand Council: "We shall carry our frontier to the Gotthard." (Chapter D.I)
August 1940	Switzerland grants Italy a credit of CHF 75 million for arms deliveries (doubled in 1941) and Germany a clearing credit of CHF 150 million. (Chapter D.I)
1942	Monthly Gotthard transit exceeds 500,000 tonnes, more than three quarters of it German coal. (Chapter D.I)
13 August 1942	A federal circular excludes refugees "only on racial grounds" from political asylum. (Chapter D.I)
8 September 1943	The Italian armistice brings some 10,000 soldiers to the Ticinese border in a single night (16–17 September). More than 20,000 Italian soldiers are interned that autumn. (Chapter D.I)

Chronology 1914–1989: the rise of the third financial centre

Date	Event
12 July 1944	The federal authorities finally instruct the border to admit all civilians in danger of life and limb. (Chapter D.I)
10 September 1944	Partisans proclaim the Ossola Republic. After its fall on 23 October much of the population flees to Switzerland. (Chapter D.I)
1945–1990	
1945	At the end of the war Ticino has eleven banks with about 500 employees. (Chapter D.II)
16 February 1945	The Federal Council blocks German assets. (Chapter D.I)
3–19 March 1945	Operation Sunrise: secret talks in Lugano, Zurich and Ascona prepare the surrender of German forces in Italy, which takes effect on 2 May 1945. (Chapter D.I)
25 May 1946	Washington Agreement: Switzerland pays CHF 250 million and agrees to liquidate German assets. (Chapter D.I)
1947–1964	Banks founded with Italian capital multiply in Lugano, among them the Banco di Roma per la Svizzera (1947), Cornèr Banca (1952), Banca del Gottardo (1957), Banca del Ceresio (1958) and Banca del Sempione (1960). (Chapter D.II)
18 April 1948	Italy's first parliamentary election under the Republican constitution, won by the Christian Democrats against the Communist-Socialist front. (Chapter D.II)
30 June 1954	A second Gotthard committee is founded to obtain a year-round road connection to Ticino. (Chapter C.III)
1956	Philipp Brothers, then the largest ore and metals trader, moves to Zug. Switzerland's rise as a merchanting nation follows. (Chapter F.I)
20 April 1959	European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, supplemented for Switzerland and Italy by a bilateral agreement of 10 September 1998. (Chapter C.II)
23 March 1961	The Lex von Moos introduces a federal authorization requirement for land purchases by foreigners. (Chapter D.II)
April 1961	Texon Finanzanstalt is established in Liechtenstein. Through it the Chiasso branch of the Schweizerische Kreditanstalt channels Italian deposits into Italian companies. (Chapter D.III)

Date	Event
May 1961	Valori & Cambi (Valcambi) is founded in Balerna, one of three large gold refineries in the Mendrisiotto established from 1951 onwards. (Chapter F.I)
29 December 1962	Italy's first centre-left government introduces a withholding tax on dividends, followed by heavy capital outflows (estimated at 2.5 per cent of GDP in 1963). (Chapter D.II)
1964	A federal decree against inflation bans interest on foreign deposits (confirmed by popular vote on 28 February 1965). The Italian- financed Banca Vallugano is founded and later fails. (Chapter D.II)
1965	Lugano, a town of about 25,000 inhabitants, hosts 358 financial companies. (Chapter D.II)
1956–1966	Funds collected by banks in Ticino grow by 242 per cent against 168 per cent for all Swiss banks, driven by Italian capital. (Chapter D.II)
1969	Italian assets in Swiss banks are estimated at over CHF 9 billion. The Piazza Fontana bombing in Milan on 12 December opens the "years of lead". (Chapter D.II)
8 March 1971	A papal bull makes Lugano a fully independent diocese. (Chapters A.I, B.III)
8 October 1971	Federal Decree on the protection of the currency after the collapse of Bretton Woods. From July 1972 foreign franc deposits bear a commission of 2 per cent per quarter. (Chapter D.II)
1972	Lugano merges with Brè-Aldesago and Castagnola, the first of three waves of aggregation. The Lex Celio (26 June) restricts foreign investment in Swiss real estate. (Chapter D.II)
January 1973	Italy introduces a two-tier foreign exchange market. IRPEF and IRPEG follow on 1 January 1974. (Chapter D.II)
3 October 1974	Switzerland and Italy agree on the taxation of cross-border workers (<i>frontalieri</i>), with part of the tax revenue paid to Italian border municipalities. (Chapter D.II)
1975–1984	The Pizza Connection network ships heroin worth about USD 1.6 billion to the United States, with proceeds passing through Swiss accounts and couriers via Ponte Chiasso. (Chapter D.IV)

Chronology 1914–1989: the rise of the third financial centre

Date	Event
1975	Cornèr Banca becomes the first bank in Switzerland to issue Visa cards. (Chapter E.I)
4 March 1976	An Italian decree-law makes the illegal export of capital a crime. Residents must declare foreign assets by 19 November 1976. (Chapter D.II)
9 March 1976	Switzerland and Italy sign in Rome the convention for the avoidance of double taxation, five days after Italy criminalized capital exports. Ratified by Italy on 23 December 1978, it enters into force on 27 March 1979. (Chapters D.II, H.III)
14 April 1976	A Swiss ordinance limits imports of foreign banknotes to CHF 20,000 per person and quarter. (Chapter D.II)
1976–1977	Zegna's Swiss company Consitex begins production in the Mendrisiotto, the start of the "Fashion Valley". (Chapter F.III)
Early 1977	Weisscredit in Lugano loses its banking licence after losses of some CHF 120 million. (Chapter D.II)
14 April 1977	The Kreditanstalt announces irregular transactions at its Chiasso branch, the start of the Chiasso scandal. Branch director Ernst Kuhrmeier had resigned the day before. (Chapter D.III)
24 April 1977	Ticino authorities arrest Kuhrmeier and his two vice-directors, among them his deputy Claudio Laffranchi, on charges of unfaithful management. The bank assumes commitments of about CHF 2.2 billion and a net loss of CHF 1.2–1.4 billion. (Chapter D.III)
2 June 1977	The banks, the Swiss Bankers Association and the SNB conclude the due diligence agreement (CDB 77), in force from 1 July 1977, requiring client identification and banning active assistance in capital flight and tax evasion. (Chapter D.III)
June 1977	Fabio Vassalli, member of the Ticino Council of State, resigns over his dealings with Texon (on 19 June according to the English- language literature). The National Council devotes its sitting of 22 June 1977 to the Chiasso affair. (Chapter D.III)
1979	Bruno Bolfo founds the steel trader Duferco, active on Lake Lugano from the 1980s. (Chapter F.I)

Date	Event
3 July 1979	The Ticino Court of Assizes sentences Kuhrmeier and Laffranchi to four and a half years' imprisonment. (Chapter D.III)
8 October 1979	The Social Democrats submit their banking initiative against the abuse of banking secrecy. Voters reject it on 20 May 1984 by 73 per cent and all cantons. (Chapter D.III)
5 September 1980	The Gotthard road tunnel (about 16.9 kilometres) opens. The motorway over the Monte Ceneri follows in 1984. (Chapter C.III)
1981–1994	Carla Del Ponte serves as investigating magistrate and public prosecutor in Lugano, working with Giovanni Falcone on Mafia money in Swiss banks. (Chapter D.IV)
20 March 1981	Federal Act on International Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters (IMAC), with exceptions for political and fiscal offences. (Chapter C.II)
1982	Ticino counts 44 banking institutions with more than 7,000 employees. (Chapter D.II)
18 June 1982	Roberto Calvi of Banco Ambrosiano is found hanged in London. Banco Ambrosiano is placed in liquidation on 6 August 1982, and its Lugano subsidiary Banca del Gottardo passes to the Sumitomo Bank. (Chapters D.II, D.IV)
13 September 1982	Italy's Rognoni-La Torre Law creates the offence of Mafia-type association (Art. 416-bis Italian Criminal Code). (Chapter D.IV)
1 October 1982	The first revision of the due diligence agreement enters into force for a further five years, with the National Bank and the Bankers Association still as parties. (Chapter D.III)
16 December 1983	The Lex Friedrich on land purchases by persons abroad (in force from 1985, and known as the Lex Koller since 1997). (Chapter D.II)
8 April 1984	Gaetano Badalamenti is arrested in Madrid. The Pizza Connection trial in New York ends on 2 March 1987 with eighteen convictions, and a first related Swiss trial is held in Lugano in 1985. (Chapter D.IV)

Chronology 1914–1989: the rise of the third financial centre

Date	Event
18 June 1984	Ticino adopts the Law on the Exercise of the Fiduciary Professions (LFid), in force from 1 January 1985, the only cantonal licensing regime for fiduciaries in Switzerland. (Chapter E.III)
21 July 1986	The Federal Department of Justice and Police asks the former Sottoceneri prosecutor Paolo Bernasconi to draft a money laundering offence. He reports on 15 September 1986. (Chapter D.IV)
February 1987	Police in Bellinzona seize about 100 kilograms of morphine base and heroin, opening the Lebanon Connection investigation. (Chapter D.IV)
1 October 1987	The CDB 87 enters into force as a purely private convention of the banks, the National Bank having terminated the earlier agreement. (Chapter D.III)
1988	Angelo Dalle Molle founds the artificial intelligence institute IDSIA in Lugano. It becomes affiliated with USI and SUPSI in 2000. (Chapter I.III)
16 September 1988	EC and EFTA states sign the Lugano Convention on jurisdiction and judgments in Lugano. It applies between Switzerland and Italy from 1 December 1992. (Chapters B.I, H.IV)
25 October 1988	New cantonal law on the Banca dello Stato, revised in 2003 (in force 30 June 2004) to make it a universal bank with a smaller board. (Chapter C.IV)
27 October 1988	Federal Councillor Elisabeth Kopp telephones her husband and asks him to resign from the board of Shakarchi Trading, which he does the same day. (Chapter D.IV)
November 1988	Bellinzona prosecutors announce that CHF 1.5–2 billion of drug proceeds have passed through Swiss bank accounts. (Chapter D.IV)
12 December 1988	Federal Councillor Elisabeth Kopp announces her resignation after warning her husband about investigations into Shakarchi Trading. She leaves office on 12 January 1989 and is acquitted in February 1990. (Chapter D.IV)

Date	Event
31 January 1989	Both chambers set up a parliamentary commission of inquiry (PUK) on the Kopp affair under Moritz Leuenberger. Its report of 24 November 1989 also reveals the federal police files that trigger the <i>Fichenaffäre</i> . (Chapter D.IV)
1989–1990	The Associazione Bancaria Ticinese creates the Centro di Studi Bancari at Villa Negroni in Vezia (sources give 1989 or 1990), a foundation since 2009 under the name CSVN. (Chapters E.I, I.III)
10 May 1989	The Federal Council opts for a network solution with Gotthard and Lötschberg base tunnels. (Chapter C.III)
12 June 1989	The Federal Council presents its message on the money laundering offence, citing the Pizza and Lebanon Connections. (Chapter D.IV)
21 June 1989	Dynamite is found at Falcone's villa at Addaura while Carla Del Ponte and Claudio Lehmann are his guests. (Chapter D.IV)

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/lugano-chronology-1914/1989-the-rise-of-the-third-financial-centre