

From provisional premises to Viale Stefano Franscini 7

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On 23 June 2003 the general project direction for the new federal courts, chaired by Heinrich Koller, Director of the Federal Office of Justice, approved Viale Franscini in Bellinzona as the location of the Federal Criminal Court. The court was to begin on 1 April 2004 in temporary premises and move to a permanent building planned for 2008. About 90 jobs were expected, compared with about 450 at the Federal Administrative Court in St. Gallen.¹ The canton made available the Pretorio, its courthouse in Bellinzona, and the building of the former cantonal business school (*Scuola cantonale di commercio*) on the same avenue. A framework convention of 2006 between the canton and the Confederation provided that the Confederation would convert the former school for the court. The canton would renovate the Pretorio for its own needs and bear 43 per cent of the restructuring costs, against 57 per cent for the Confederation. The canton remained the owner of the property and leased it to the Confederation until 2043, with a purchase right in favour of the Confederation.² Until the new building was ready, the court used a hall in the Pretorio for its hearings.³

The permanent building at Viale Stefano Franscini 7 was inaugurated on 25 October 2013, more than nine years after the court had begun its work and five years later than first planned.⁴ It combines the restored historic school building with a new extension, courtrooms, offices for the judges and clerks, and secure areas for the transport and custody of defendants. The Appeals Chamber, created in 2019, was not foreseen in the original space programme, which had reserved only about 100 square metres for such a function. It needed about 1,682 square metres. The canton therefore decided to restructure and enlarge the Pretorio once again. In March 2021 the Council of State asked the Grand Council for a net credit of CHF 43.42 million, part of a total investment of about CHF 50.25 million.⁵ The first stone was laid on 1 September 2023. The renovated Pretorio, with about

3,650 square metres on six levels, will house the Appeals Chamber of the Federal Criminal Court, the cantonal criminal magistrate (*Pretura penale*) and units of the cantonal police. Two legal challenges against the award of contracts, both rejected, delayed the works.⁶ According to the court's annual report for 2025, the handover of the building to the Appeals Chamber was expected in the spring of 2027.⁷

Date Event
12 March 2000 People and cantons accept the reform of the judiciary (Art. 191a Cst.)
1 January 2002 Efficiency bill: federal jurisdiction for organized and economic crime
21 June 2002 Federal Assembly chooses Bellinzona and St. Gallen as seats
4 October 2002 Federal Act on the Federal Criminal Court (SGG) adopted
1 October 2003 Election of the first eleven federal criminal judges
1 April 2004 Court begins work in provisional premises in Bellinzona
1 January 2007 Second Board of Appeal for mutual assistance
1 January 2011 CrimPC and StBOG/LOAP enter into force
1 January 2012 The two Boards of Appeal are merged
25 October 2013 Inauguration of the building at Viale Stefano Franscini 7
1 January 2019 Appeals Chamber begins work
1 September 2023 First stone of the restructured Pretorio

Source: Federal Criminal Court, chronology (below), and the documents cited in this section.

Essentials. The Federal Criminal Court is a creation of the reform of the judiciary accepted on 12 March 2000 (Art. 191a Cst.). Before 2004 federal criminal cases were tried by a chamber of the Federal Tribunal or by federal assizes, which sat where the case required. The Federal Assembly chose Bellinzona as the seat on 21 June 2002, after the Council of States had supported Ticino's candidacy against the reservations of the Federal Council. The court began its work on 1 April 2004 and moved into its own building at Viale Stefano Franscini 7 on 25 October 2013. Its Appeals Chamber, operating since 1 January 2019, will move into the restructured cantonal Pretorio of Bellinzona.

1 Notes

1. Federal Administrative Court (project direction for the new federal courts), "Le sedi dei nuovi tribunali federali", press release of 23 June 2003, https://www.bvger.ch/media-releases/2002-2006/it/le_sedi_dei_nuovi_tribunali_federali.pdf. ↩
2. Gran Consiglio, Rapporto No. 7968 R (above); Consiglio di Stato, Messaggio No. 6248 of 8 July 2009,

<https://www4.ti.ch/fileadmin/POTERI/GC/allegati/odg-mes/pdf/6248M.pdf>. ↩

3. Federal Criminal Court, "Cronistoria" (above), entry for 1 April 2004. ↩
4. Federal Criminal Court, "Cronistoria" (above), entry for 25 October 2013; Gran Consiglio, Rapporto No. 7968 R (above). The building was designed by the architects Bearth & Deplazes with Durisch + Nolli. ↩
5. Gran Consiglio, Rapporto No. 7968 R (above); "Verso un nuovo pretorio di Bellinzona", RSI, 2 March 2021, <https://www.rsi.ch/info/ticino-grigioni-e-insubria/Verso-un-nuovo-pretorio-di-Bellinzona--1247931.html>. ↩
6. "La prima pietra del nuovo pretorio è stata posata", Ticinonline, 1 September 2023, <https://www.tio.ch/ticino/attualita/1693602/la-prima-pietra-del-nuovo-pretorio-e-stata-posata>; laRegione, report on the Pretorio works, <https://www.laregione.ch/cantone/bellinzone/1693298/servizi> (about 3,650 m², of which about 1,450 m² for the Federal Criminal Court; two rejected appeals; completion then expected in autumn 2026). ↩
7. Federal Criminal Court, Geschäftsbericht 2025 , 17 March 2026, https://www.bstger.ch/uploads/2026-03-17_GB_2025_BStGer_d.pdf. ↩

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