

## The language of Swiss law

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Swiss federal law is published in German, French and Italian, and all three versions are equally authoritative. Romansh versions exist for important texts. English is not an official language of federal legislation. The Confederation nonetheless publishes unofficial English translations of many federal acts and ordinances on its legal platform Fedlex, particularly in the fields of commercial, financial market, tax and private international law.<sup>1</sup> The translations carry a notice that they have no legal force and that only the versions in the official languages are authoritative.

The English translations have become an important tool for the international business community. Foreign lawyers, in-house counsel and investors use them to understand Swiss law without learning German or French. They are, however, not always reliable guides to the meaning of the law. The translators must render Swiss legal concepts into English terms that have their own meanings in common law systems. The choices they make may mislead readers who are not familiar with Swiss law. A careful adviser reads the English translation together with the German or French original, and relies on the original when the two diverge.

## 1 Notes

1. Federal Act of 18 June 2004 on the Compilations of Federal Legislation and the Federal Gazette (Publications Act, PublG, SR 170.512), text on [droit-bilingue.ch](http://droit-bilingue.ch): Art. 14 para. 1 (simultaneous publication in the official languages German, French and Italian; for enactments the three versions are equally binding), para. 5 (publication in Romansh governed by Art. 11 of the Languages Act) and para. 6 (texts of particular importance or international interest may be published on the publication platform in further languages, in particular English); Art. 15 (authoritative version). ↔

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*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.*

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