



## Federal Department of Finance FDF

---

### Plurilingualism policy

### A public policy the same as any other?

Bern, Bernerhof, Tuesday, 1 March 2016

### Speech by Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer

President of the National Council,

Representatives of international, federal, cantonal and communal authorities,

Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Upon taking up my new duties recently, I inherited quite a diverse language portfolio. Firstly, there was the language of high finance, where it is in good taste to use Anglicisms to express terms that nobody would understand otherwise.

There was also the colourful language of fiscal policy (in the red, in the black...) and the language of taxation, whose vocabulary is rich in some strange expressions. And finally, there was the specific characteristic of our country: plurilingualism.

Even languages are connected to finance in Switzerland, which is why I, as Head of the Federal Department of Finance, have the pleasure of extending a warm welcome to you all.

I would especially like to address a few words to Canada's Commissioner of Official Languages. Mr Fraser, thank you for being here with us today! We have a lot to share and learn from each other in terms of the language history of our countries.

The language of this meeting today is French, the official language common to our two countries. However, as I'm sure you have quickly deduced from my accent, French is not my mother tongue.

So, we have one fundamental point in common: *we don't speak French*, but we understand each other.

Our countries have an important characteristic in common: federalism. That is the natural setting in which our languages and cultures have developed and are constantly renewing themselves.

Therefore, we are a country that is defined by our languages and language regions. Our plurilingualism has shaped and continues to shape the history of Switzerland.

Switzerland and its people are a "Willesnation", a nation born of will, our common will.

The Federal Administration is a microcosm of Switzerland. It must guarantee the equal representation of our language communities and promote the balanced use of our official languages.

It takes commitment, drive and stamina to meet the ambitious targets set in the Languages Act and Languages Ordinance.

Ja, das ist sportlich!

It was with this in mind that the Federal Council approved the *Evaluation report and recommendations on plurilingualism policy*.

The report contains in particular Federal Council instructions on plurilingualism.

Top priority is given to the development of a system for evaluating the language skills of Confederation personnel.

Priority is also given to the development of a new system for evaluating plurilingualism policy, a topic that has already been discussed this afternoon.

And I am looking forward to hearing Canada's Commissioner of Official Languages speak to us this evening on *The importance of leadership in implementing language policies*.

I will not hide the fact that when I arrived at the Federal Department of Finance, my priorities were centred on other objectives:

- the rules that we apply to our private budget must also apply for the state budget: we cannot – and should not – live beyond our means;
- we should guarantee the economical use of taxpayers' money;
- extreme regulation stifles the economy, and also the administration.

Just as in other sectors, the aim for plurilingualism policy is to ensure a balance between our national cohesion and the resources available.

This very balance has also been applied to the new legal framework for public procurement, which is also one of my department's concerns. The language question is one of the sensitive and priority issues strengthened by the new law. The version chosen takes much greater

account of official languages in all phases of public procurement than was previously the case. It also guarantees a sustainable and balanced use of resources.

Before concluding, I would like to turn my attention to young people.

The Confederation is currently collaborating at various levels to strengthen language and cultural exchanges. The Confederation and the cantons recently decided to give new impetus to promoting these exchanges. A new joint agency will be created for this purpose. It is crucial that our young people acquire the national languages as early as possible.

In 2015, the Confederation's apprentices were invited for the first time to take part in a competition organised by the Forum Helveticum, a Swiss association that actively promotes plurilingualism. This initiative enabled 1,500 young people to become aware of the value of our languages.

There is no shortage of examples, and this is a long-term endeavour. Our commitment must be constantly renewed.

Switzerland has little in terms of raw materials, but for our country, plurilingualism is a national cement that binds us all together. Thank you very much for your attention. Grazia, grazie, merci, Dankeschön.