



In Collaboration with:



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Anti-Corruption & Compliance Programmes SWITZERLAND

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH



Olivier Bovet
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Esteemed Faculty Member **Olivier Bovet** of Federal State Secretariat of Economic Affairs shared insights on the latest enforcement and compliance developments affecting industry in Switzerland.

QUESTIONS:

1 Can You Give Us a Brief Introduction to Your Background?

I have been working 25 years in government and international organizations. I spent most of my professional years in managing cooperation projects or programs in developing or transition countries. These included 3 assignments abroad, in Pakistan, Serbia and Tunisia. In all these countries, one crucial element I noticed which hampers the development and sharing of wealth is the mistrust of the population with its government, and vice versa. We are lucky to live in a country where we trust our authorities are doing their best to maximize our wellbeing!

2 What are Your Current Activities?

After returning from Tunisia, I was offered to manage SECO's anti-corruption activities. These include among others heading the Swiss delegation to the OECD working group monitoring the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention. This group, called the Working Group on Bribery, meets 4 times a year and its main task is to evaluate the implementation of the Convention by its 44 Member States.

3 Why is the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention So Important for Switzerland?

Switzerland is a small country earning around 50% of its GDP on external markets. We are therefore very dependent on international organizations to ensure a "level playing field", a fair competition in international markets for Swiss companies. The Convention makes corruption of foreign public officials a criminal offense in all 44 Member States, and monitors that this is enforced. Ensuring similar work conditions in all these markets, which account for 80% of exports worldwide, is a good way to ensure a "level playing field".

4 Do the International Conventions of Which Switzerland is a Member Have Implications for Switzerland?

Switzerland fares quite highly on international standards, it is ranked 4th at the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International. In spite of this overall good position, both the OECD and the Council of Europe have in their evaluations of our country made recommendations for Switzerland to improve its implementation of their Conventions. The OECD recommends improvements in the protection of whistleblowers in private sector as well as a lifting of the sanctions level for companies; the European Council expects improvements in the transparency of financing of political parties.

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5 What are Your Observations on the Current Trends With Regard to International Rules to Fight Against Corruption?

The current trends are not so easy to read. On the one hand, we witness new initiatives to make the fight against corruption more effective and efficient, with e.g. the EU Regulation on Whistleblowing, which will set a uniform set of rules applicable in the 27 EU countries as of 2021. Also, international cooperation in fighting corruption has notably improved, with successful results e.g. between Switzerland and Brazil, and many others.

On the other hand, recent discussions in the USA on revising anti-corruption legislation or the Dodd Frank Act are steps in the other direction, which is wrong if we want to fight corruption. Similar signals of hesitations in enforcing the fight against corruption have been given by other countries.

6 What are You Doing to Ensure the Compliance of Swiss Companies Working Abroad?

First, we seek every opportunity to remind the private sector that the Federal Council expects companies based in or working from Switzerland to implement effective compliance programs for preventing bribery. We also sensitize them through a brochure on "Preventing Corruption" which is widely available in print and on the internet and via presentations in conferences such as this conference. Our Embassies abroad also lend support to Swiss companies in that they provide them with information on the market, on the dangers to look out, on lawyers to hire in cases of problems linked to corruption or other. Last but not least, of course, the prosecution authorities of Switzerland on the federal and the cantonal levels are doing their work enforcing the anti-corruption, anti-bribery legislations in place.

7 What are Your Expectations From Participating in This Year's C5 Conference?

Probably the need of enforcement authorities to set the tone, not only from the top but also for the function itself, especially for those responsible of Compliance supervision at Board level.

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