Political System

The political power in Switzerland is divided into three levels: the confederation, the cantons (states), and the communities. The Swiss vote on political matters.

The Swiss Confederation

The Swiss Confederation was founded in 1848. The capital is Bern. Switzerland does not form an ethnic, linguistic or religious entity. Because it is comprised of different cultures that came together of their own free will the term "Nation by Choice" (Willensnation) is used. Switzerland takes up a neutral position in international politics.

Federalism

In Switzerland the cantons and communities have a great deal of independence. This is called federalism. The 26 cantons and over 2000 communities have fully developed state structures. Canton Aargau has its own constitution and government, a parlament, and courts. The cantons and communities are responsible for many public duties. This is why the school systems are built differently in the different cantons. Federal laws apply throughout the country. Cantons have their own laws which apply only within the canton. Even communities can enact own rules. In order to fulfill their duties the cantons and communities as well as the confederation raise taxes.

Separation of Powers

To prevent a concentration of power Switzerland has three independent powers: the legislative power, the executive power and the judiciary power. In Canton Aargau the following authorities exercise these powers:

- Legislative power: Grand Council (Grosser Rat) (140 members, elected by the public every four years)
- Executive power: Cantonal Government (Regierungsrat) (5 members, elected by the public every four years)
- Judiciary power: Various courts on the levels of the districts and the canton

The communities also have a legislative power (community assembly or parliament) (Gemeindeversammlung, Parlament) and an executive power (city council or community council) (Stadtrat, Gemeinderat). The national government (7 members) is called the Federal Council (Bundesrat). On the national level there are various courts. The Federal Tribunal is the highest instance where, for example, cantonal rulings can be appealed against.

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Democratic rights

The Swiss have the right to vote and to stand as candidates. They elect the political bodies on a community, cantonal and federal level and can run as candidates. In addition popular votes are held on political matters on a community, cantonal and federal level (direct democracy). Popular initiatives enable citizens to bring issues that are important to them to vote. Foreigners who live in Canton Aargau do not have the right to vote or to run as candidates. They may however address the authorities by filing a petition.

Fundamental Rights

The fundamental legal principles are documented in the Federal Constitution (Bundesverfassung). The fundamental rights which are based on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) form an important part of the Federal Constitution. They protect human existence (e.g. right to life, right to assistance when in need) and protect individuals from state violence or protect groups from majorities. They guarantee that nobody be discriminated against based on origin, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation. Victims of racial discrimination receive free support and advice in Canton Aargau. Freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press prevail in Switzerland.

Additional information (links, addresses, information sheets, brochures)

www.merhaba-aargau.ch/en/canton-aargau/political-system

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