



United Nations



Sixty-fifth
session of the
General Assembly

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Biographical
note



President of the sixty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly

H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss

Joseph Deiss was elected President of the sixty-fifth session of the United Nations General Assembly on 11 June 2010.

An economist and politician with extensive experience in multilateral affairs, Mr. Deiss served in the Federal Council of Switzerland (Swiss cabinet) from 1999 to 2006. During this period, while holding the post of Economics Minister (2003 to 2006), he was elected, in 2004, to serve as President of the Swiss Confederation—a position which is rotated annually among Cabinet members—and headed his country's presidential delegation to the United Nations General Assembly. Earlier, while serving as Foreign Minister, from 1999 to 2002, he spearheaded Switzerland's accession campaign to the UN.

Over the course of his term as a cabinet minister, Mr. Deiss was active in the sphere of world trade, leading his country's delegation at key negotiations of the Doha Round of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Cancun (Mexico), Montreal (Canada), Paris (France), Geneva (Switzerland) and Hong Kong (China). In this context, he initiated the establishment of, and subsequently chaired, the Group of Ten (G-10) countries—a coalition of net importers of agricultural products—which has become a principal actor in the WTO negotiations. Mr. Deiss was also a member of the board of governors of both the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and directed Switzerland's negotiations with the European Union.

In 2001, Mr. Deiss chaired the UN Economic Commission for Europe regional preparatory conference for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. He also led his country's delegation to the Summit in Johannesburg (South Africa) in 2002 and, earlier that year, to the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey (Mexico). In addition, he presided over the Swiss delegation to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). As a Federal Councillor, Mr. Deiss was also ministerial head of Swiss delegations to numerous other international bodies including the Council of Europe, the (then) UN Human Rights Commission, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). In addition, in 2002, he chaired the ministerial conference of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

Prior to his election to the Federal Council, Mr. Deiss served as a member of the Swiss Parliament (National Council) from 1991 to 1999, where he chaired a parliamentary committee (1997 to 1998) tasked with reviewing the Swiss Federal Constitution. Earlier, from 1995 to 1997, he served as Vice-President

of the Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee. Mr. Deiss began his political career in 1981 as a member of the parliament of the Swiss canton of Fribourg, a post he held for a decade. He also had a 14-year stint as mayor of the municipality of Barberêche, from 1982 to 1996, and served as Switzerland's Price Supervisor in charge of regulating all non-competitive and administrated prices, from 1993 to 1996.

In the academic realm, Mr. Deiss has been a professor of economics at a number of Swiss universities, including Fribourg, Lausanne and Geneva, and was Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Fribourg, his alma mater, from 1996 to 1998. Since 2007, he has been professor of political economy at the same university and is a member of the Strategic Council of Saint Joseph University in Beirut (Lebanon). Fluent in French, German, English and Italian, Mr. Deiss earned a doctorate of economics from the University of Fribourg and was a research student at King's College Cambridge (UK).

The recipient of numerous honours and distinctions, Mr. Deiss was awarded Japan's Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun (2008) and France's Officier de l'Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur (2007). He also holds honorary doctorates from the Business School of Lausanne, Switzerland (2008), the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland (2007), and the University of Sofia, Bulgaria (2001). He currently serves as a board member of a number of institutions including the Emmi Group (Lucerne, Switzerland) and the Zurich Insurance company (Ireland and South Africa). In addition, he is a Vice-Chairman of the Zurich Financial Services International Advisory Council.

Born in the bilingual canton of Fribourg, Switzerland, on 18 January 1946, Mr. Deiss is married with three children.