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Press release

## Swiss Federal Audit Office examines cyber-risks in critical infrastructures

Bern, 20.5.2021, 2pm – The Finance Delegation and the Federal Council have taken note of the annual report of the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO). Aside from monitoring the measures taken in connection with the pandemic, the SFAO observed a considerable increase in whistleblowing reports and identified a number of worrying cyber-risks in critical infrastructures.

The SFAO's audits have produced initial results in the area of critical infrastructures. With regard to financial intermediary supervision, the SFAO found that the banks' obligation to report cyberincidents to FINMA was not sufficiently respected, resulting in a lack of information for the regulator. Moreover, several experts have pointed to cyber-risks in the interbank payment system. For legal reasons, the SFAO was unable to examine the measures for protecting this system, which remains a black box in the Swiss banking system in the SFAO's view.

Another example concerns building automation aspects in the Federal Administration. Deficiencies were found in the automation of buildings, in the infrastructure and in the networking of application systems, as well as in security and safety systems. The Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics (FOBL) acknowledged the SFAO's findings and immediately introduced targeted corrective measures.



## **The federal response to the health crisis was effective, but challenges remain**

The measures taken in response to the pandemic were the subject of several reviews in 2020. The SFAO's annual report mentions the main results, particularly in the area of joint and several bridging loans and short-time working compensation. In the first case, the number of suspicious cases is on the rise. In the second case, there is a high risk of abuse of short-time working compensation in the absence of any real possibility of checking matters beforehand due to the summary procedure for the granting of such compensation by the authorities.

The SFAO also used the crisis as an opportunity to expand its data analysis. Subject to strict legal conditions, the SFAO collected and analysed in detail a considerable amount of information on the compensation paid out during the crisis. The SFAO is currently the only body in Switzerland that has an overview of the data concerning the various federal programmes that can identify possible duplicate compensation. Several audits and evaluations of pandemic-related measures are being carried out in 2021.

## **Dramatic increase in whistleblower reports**

The SFAO received 484 reports on its secure whistleblowing system in 2020, versus 187 in 2019. This surge was largely due to reports related to the health crisis and the Confederation's support measures, especially the suspected abuse of short-time working compensation. The SFAO dealt with all of these reports in the course of its audit activities or forwarded them to the competent authorities, including the criminal prosecution authorities.

The SFAO published 63 audits and evaluations in 2020 (2019: 49) and responded to around 100 media requests. There were five requests for access to audit reports under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and the SFAO granted full or partial access in four cases.

At the end of December 2020, the SFAO had a staff of 129 (117.3 FTEs), versus 119 (108.3 FTEs) a year earlier. Its expenses amounted to CHF 29.8 million, while its revenue was almost CHF 1.3 million.

## **Further details**

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*The SFAO's annual report for 2020 is available on its website: [www.sfao.admin.ch](http://www.sfao.admin.ch).*