

- » **Swiss chocolate, wrist watches, and pocket knives are prime export items. But Heidi and William Tell are also household names all over the world. But what does “Swissness” actually mean? And what do all Swiss have in common?**

## Origins of a common identity

Switzerland is a small country with four national languages. Its people have different religions, ways of living, aspirations, and worries. Immigration and emigration are constantly changing the population’s composition – as does migration from town to country and vice versa. Switzerland has always been defined by these differences within a greater common whole. Briefly, this is how Switzerland came into being: In 1848, cantons that had previously been independent came together to create a federal state. New nation states were being formed beyond the borders of Switzerland as well. The modern federal state standardised certain aspects like the postal system, customs, revenue, and law. However, the individual regions of Switzerland still differ in many ways. What unifies them all is their longing for a shared history.<sup>1</sup>

The democratic system that came into being through the Swiss Constitution of 1848 is based on various different models. There are conspicuous parallels with the constitution of the USA, which is another country that was formed by independent states coming together to form a federal state.<sup>2</sup>

- ① Barack Obama was president of the USA from 2009 to 2017. In an interview he said that globalisation, technology, and migration were causing a clash of cultures and that the important thing in such a situation was to unite society rather than divide it.

a) Read this related quote by Barack Obama.



**“We are a species that tells one another stories. I think it is one of the tasks of our political leaders to tell a better story about all the things that hold us together as nations. And America is unique in that respect because it has to bring together all these completely different elements – we are not a homogeneous people, a uniform tribe. People didn’t arrive here all at the same time. What holds us together is an idea, and that’s a story about who we are and what we care about. And I want to ensure that it stays that way.”<sup>3</sup>**

1) School materials “Ideen Schweiz”, Swiss National Museum, 2016, p. 3: <https://www.landesmuseum.ch/landesmuseum/schulmaterial/ideen-schweiz/ideen-schweiz-unterlagen-fuer-schulen.pdf>

2) Hediger, S. (...) & Widmer, G. (2017). Gesellschaften im Wandel: Geschichte und Politik, Sekundarstufe I. (1st ed.). Zurich, Switzerland: Lehrmittelverlag Zürich

3) Translated from [www.piqd.de/reportagen/literatur-als-argument-gegen-eine-zynische-weltsicht-barack-obama-als-leser](http://www.piqd.de/reportagen/literatur-als-argument-gegen-eine-zynische-weltsicht-barack-obama-als-leser)



b) According to Barack Obama, what holds a highly heterogeneous society together? Explain in your own words.

c) Your class is also made up of a wide variety of different people. All of you have a different past. Some of you might come from different countries of the world and you have different native languages and probably very different interests too. What holds you together despite these differences? What shared story unites you as a class and perhaps bonds you together?

d) Does Obama's quote apply to Switzerland too? Give your reasons.

## Switzerland as a brand

### Switzerland on the label, Switzerland inside?

The story of “Swiss Label” begins in the economic crisis of the period between the two world wars. The crossbow was chosen as the official seal of quality in 1983 and became popular with the public. As the symbol denoting “Made in Switzerland”, it became firmly entrenched in the Swiss self-image in the twentieth century. In the early twenty-first century, many Swiss companies used the concept of “Swissness” to advertise their products with allusions to national symbols.<sup>4</sup>

### Meaning

Although Switzerland has four official languages of its own, “Swissness” was taken from English. However, it is a faux Anglicism. In other words, although it sounds like an English word, it doesn’t really exist in English. Other examples of such words are beamer (for a video projector) and handy (meaning a mobile phone). People in western Switzerland also use the word “suissitude”. The purpose of the term is to advertise Switzerland as a brand and associate it with desirable properties which claim to be typical of Switzerland and which are effective abroad as well.

### Definition

When is a cheese a Swiss cheese? It wouldn’t be Switzerland if the country hadn’t established very detailed rules for allowing the “Swissness” label to be used in advertising. The Swissness Regulation about the use of labels claiming Swiss origin went into force in 2017. The following criteria have to be met in order to claim a product is Swiss in origin:

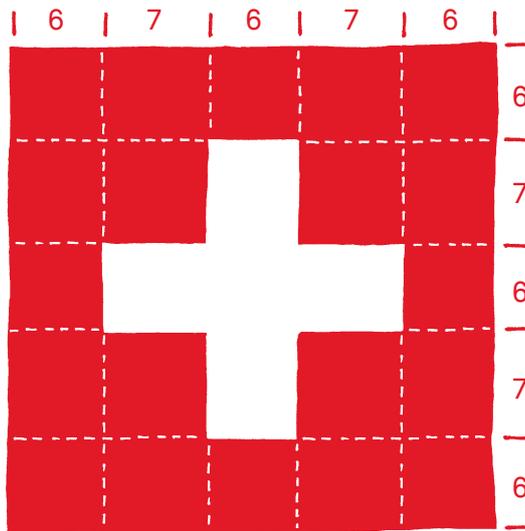
- Natural products: Must be harvested in Switzerland
- Food products: At least 80% of ingredients by weight must come from Switzerland. In the case of milk and dairy products it must be 100% of the milk.
- Manufactured goods: At least 60% of production costs (including research and development costs) must accrue in Switzerland.
- Services: The company must have its headquarters and its true administration in Switzerland.



4) “Schweizerisches Ursprungszeichen” (Swiss Label), in: Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz: <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/048949/2019-10-28/>  
5) [www.blw.admin.ch/blw/de/home/instrumente/swissness.html](http://www.blw.admin.ch/blw/de/home/instrumente/swissness.html)

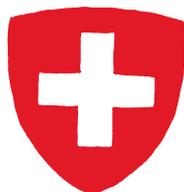
## Criss cross

Even the shape of the Swiss cross is precisely defined. The vertical arms of the cross are one-sixth longer than the horizontal ones – a 7:6 ratio. The Swiss flag has a special shape: Unlike the flags of other countries, it is square rather than rectangular.



By the way, the red colour of the coat of arms and logo was not defined until 2008. Before that, there was no uniform colour.<sup>6</sup>

e.g. on coins, locomotives, and car number plates

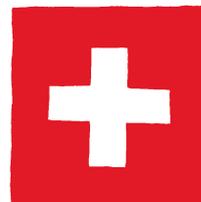


### Swiss coat of arms

The coat of arms of the Swiss Confederation is a symbol of the power and dignity of the state.

It is a protected trademark.

Private companies are not allowed to use it.<sup>7</sup>



### Swiss cross

The Swiss cross may be used only for products and services that fulfil the criteria for claiming Switzerland as their place of origin. It may not be used for products and services from abroad.<sup>7</sup>

6) [www.eda.admin.ch/eda/de/home/das-eda/umsetzung-aussenpolitik/landeskommunikation/corporate-design-landeskommunikation/geschuetzter-bereich-cd-prs/willkommen/corporate-design-der-landeskommunikation.html](http://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/de/home/das-eda/umsetzung-aussenpolitik/landeskommunikation/corporate-design-landeskommunikation/geschuetzter-bereich-cd-prs/willkommen/corporate-design-der-landeskommunikation.html)  
7) Source: [www.markenrechte.ch/swissness](http://www.markenrechte.ch/swissness)



- ② a) How much “Swissness” is in your home? What food packaging, clothing labels, or toys can you find in your home with the Swiss cross or some other kind of “Swiss Label”?

- b) Some companies, brands, and musicians use the word “Swiss” or variants of it in their names (for example, the watch brand Swatch is a combination of Swiss and watch). Do you know any more examples?

- c) Why is it necessary to define “Swissness” so precisely?