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WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION (WTO) FOR GENEVA THE GATT SUCCESSOR STAYS IN SWITZERLAND.



Switzerland is to present the Centre William Rappard to the WTO.

When the Final Act of the Uruguay Round was signed last December in Geneva by the Contracting Parties to the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) it brought into being a whole new multilateral trading system, with the biggest package of market access concessions ever negotiated. The deal will lead to the replacement of the GATT by the New World Trade Organisation (WTO). Although the official birthdate of the WTO was January 1, 1995, the GATT will continue to exist in parallel until all the participating governments have ratified the Round agreement - they have two years in which to do this. Federal Councillor Jean-Pascal Delamuraz is pushing for the Swiss

Parliament to accelerate its procedures in order to achieve ratification as soon as possible. There will then be a statutory 3-month delay in case a referendum on the issue is demanded, which seems unlikely.

So, explains William Rossier, Swiss Ambassador to the GATT "we shan't be in right at the beginning of the WTO, just as we were not in at the beginning of the GATT - we became a member only in 1966."

But he does not look too unhappy about it, as the most important battle was won last summer - the decision that the WTO should be based in Geneva. The German city of Bonn had made a determined bid to house the new organisation, no doubt influenced by the fact that with the removal of the German government to Berlin, Bonn is searching for a new role. The German Ministry of Economics made a tempting offer to the GATT preparatory committee working on the transition, asserting that the cost of living in Bonn was 30% lower than in Geneva (a figure hotly disputed by Geneva) and offering rent-free facili-

ties, free removal of personnel from Geneva, and other attractive proposals. One big drawback was the fact that the buildings which were intended as a permanent home would not be available until the Bundestag moved to Berlin, so the WTO would have to be housed temporarily elsewhere for about three years.

But as Arthur Dunkel, president of the Foundation "A Future for Geneva" and former Director-General of the GATT pointed out, the move of GATT offices and personnel from Geneva to Bonn, even though it is not so far geographically "would not be a matter of just moving a few miles down the road - the work of the organization would in effect be paralysed for at least a year, probably two."

Geneva and the Federal Government upped their offer to match every aspect of Bonn's proposal. In a letter detailing the offer, Flavio Cotti and Jean-Pascal Delamuraz wrote: "The Swiss Government is willing to take measures that go far beyond the arrangements currently applied." These measures include:

- Presenting the Centre William Rappard (CWR) - present home of the GATT - rent-free to the WTO.
- Building a new 750-seat conference hall in the grounds of the CWR.
- Building a 400-place car park nearby.
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Because the concessions to WTO personnel go beyond present conditions, they will be extended to all international diplomats throughout Switzerland.

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