

Zeitschrift:	Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber:	Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band:	75 (2009)
Heft:	[6]
Rubrik:	2009 AGM of the Swiss Society of New Zealand Inc : Ambassador Dr Beat Nobs's speech held at the AGM in Hamilton, May 31, 2009

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Ambassador Dr Beat Nobs's speech held at the AGM in Hamilton, May 31, 2009

Welcome

I am very pleased to be here in my role as patron of the Swiss Society. It is always a highlight to meet with my fellow countrymen, have a chat with many - and have a great opportunity to report on many things Swiss.

Thanks

Let me start by extending our gratitude to all the Swiss who engaged in community affairs over the last year, your work in the clubs and for the Society.

My special thanks go of course to the Hamilton Swiss Club and its president, Herbert Stäheli, for organising this gathering, the food and drinks and good company they offer to all of us today.

But thanks also go to the Wellington Swiss Club, in particular its president, Roland Schütz and the very active secretary, Trudi Brühlmann.

State of Affairs

The Embassy Chancery moved to a new location in April of this year. The reasons for the move were that the old premises had become shabby and were earthquake prone. The Swiss Government also wanted to highlight the good relationship with New Zealand and wanted to be able to offer good services to all of you.

The number of Swiss has increased again. In 2008, 6509 Swiss were registered with the Embassy, versus 6374 in 2007. The number of Swiss who hold dual nationality is up, too, from 4667 to 4730.

The number of Swiss voters has increased, too. I repeat: Register as a voter! The canton of Geneva will, as the second canton after Neuchâtel, introduce e-voting this year. Zurich is poised to be next in 2010. The federal institutions will be a bit longer in coming, but it will happen eventually. This will help to address a number of grievances that you might have. Don't forget: A Swiss doesn't just vote for elections, but decides also on political matters!

On the topic of the New Zealand Superannuation: We have not forgotten your predicament and are maintaining our pressure. But remember: This is a New Zealand government affair, it needs a law change in New Zealand to rectify this.

Bilateral Affairs Switzerland - New Zealand

We have established good contacts with the new New Zealand government after the elections.

Political consultations have taken place in Wellington by the Deputy State Secretary Pierre Helg. As you know, politically we share many points of view and are both willing and ready to engage in solutions to global problems, such as the financial crisis,

the fight against protectionism in trade and climate change.

We hope Director General of the Swiss Federal Office of Agriculture, Manfred Bötsch will visit New Zealand in November.

We offered the Minister of Transport a visit to Switzerland to see the local transportation system in Zurich and to draw lessons for Auckland.

World Economic Crisis: The situation in Switzerland

The global economic crisis has hit our country as well in many ways: Being a major financial centre, a number of Swiss banks were hit badly, especially the global players UBS and, to a lesser degree, CS. But on the other hand, the Swiss banking system consists of about 370 banks, some of which have benefited by large sums of funds that have flown out of the large banks into their coffers. These are state-guaranteed cantonal banks, Raiffeisen bank, but also private banks.

The government has, like many other governments, raised the level of guarantee for the private client to SFr 100k and also bailed out UBS by guaranteeing bad loans of SFr 64 bio. In addition, in order to counter the negative outflow of the financial crisis, two investment programs to the tune of SFr 341 mio and 700 mio towards infrastructure (road and track), public buildings, but also private homes and scientific research.

Nevertheless, as Switzerland is a very open and internationally highly integrated economy, the economic forecasts look pretty bleak: There might be a GDP reduction of up to 2% and an increase of the number of unemployed up to 5,2% in 2010, the highest since 1997. So we need to weather the storm a bit longer and hope for an improvement as soon as possible.

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