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Speaking points for the speech held by the Ambassador of Switzerland in New Zealand

Dr. Marion Weichelt Krupski,
on the occasion of the Annual General Meeting of the Swiss Society,
5 June 2011, Wainuiomata

Introduction

It's a pleasure to be here and to be given the opportunity to speak for about half an hour. The AGM of Swiss Society is an important meeting, bringing together all of the Swiss Clubs of New Zealand. It's a wonderful occasion to meet with you all.

I would like to

- take a look at Swiss politics in the past year.
- look at what is coming up – not only in NZ an election year, also in CH.
- and have a brief look at the most important relationship CH has, CH-EU.
- Then I would like to conclude with a brief update on some of the Swiss-Kiwi issues.

PAST YEAR

Transport

- Masterpiece of engineering:
- Breakthrough in the Gotthard base tunnel – now world's longest tunnel.
- In March 2011, the last meters of rock were drilled.
- It is scheduled to open to traffic in 2017, 21 years after **construction started (1996)**,
- The Gotthard Base Tunnel with its **length of 57 kilometres** is now the world's longest tunnel.

Politics

Significant changes in government

- Federal Councilor **Moritz Leuenberger**, Transport Minister, resigned at the end of 2010 after 15 years in government.
- Federal Councilor **Hans-Rudolf Merz**, Finance Minister, left after 7 years in government at the end of 2010.

Numerically replaced by the newly elected:

- **Simonetta Sommaruga** and **Johann Schneider-Ammann** have been elected to replace the two leaving ministers.

After the elections of the two new members of government a **major ministry reshuffle** took place:

- Only three out of seven ministers kept their portfolio: ministers for the interior (Didier Burkhalter), defence (Ueli Maurer) and foreign affairs (Micheline Calmy-Rey).
- After four years in office Economics Minister Doris Leuthard took over the transport, energy, environment and communications portfolios. Schneider-Ammann took over her economics portfolio.
- Justice Minister Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf changed

to the finance ministry and Sommaruga took her place at the justice ministry.

Foreign: Micheline Calmy-Rey

Interior: Didier Burkhalter

Defence/sport: Ueli Maurer

Transport/energy/ communications/ environment: Doris Leuthard

Finance: Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf

Economics: Johann Schneider-Ammann

Justice: Simonetta Sommaruga

Not only a major reshuffle but:

- Switzerland now has **four women ministers, forming a female majority in government**, for the first time in its history.
- Federal Chancellor: Corina Casanova, another woman.
- Remarkable, since women only gained the federal right to vote in 1971.

Popular Initiatives

- Expulsion initiative accepted
 - On November 28 2010, some 53 per cent of voters backed an initiative for the **automatic expulsion of foreigners convicted of a crime**.
- Implementation of the initiative raises difficulties, since its wording runs counter to the Swiss constitution and to Swiss international obligations under treaties. A Task Force is currently looking into the question, as to how the initiative can be made compatible with national and international law.
- The People reject initiative banning army firearms from the home
 - The initiative called for **army firearms to remain in barracks** and for a **central arms register**. The initiative was rejected with 56.3% of votes.
- Swiss gun laws are among the most liberal worldwide. Most army firearms are still stored at home, but since the beginning of 2010, under the pressure of the initiative, a new law was enacted and they can now also be kept in cantonal arsenals if one wishes to do so.

Banking secrecy

- Banking secrecy was enshrined in Swiss law in 1935.
- What does bank secrecy mean? -> It protects the privacy of bank clients. Banks are not allowed to provide to authorities personal and account information about their customers.
- The validity of bank secrecy is not unlimited and has never been unlimited. If there are suspicions of criminal activities it is lifted.
- For the last years Switzerland has been under **continuous attack, reproaching Switzerland** for helping foreign tax evaders hide their assets.

FROM THE AMBASSADOR

- The OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) placed Switzerland on a “**grey list**” of uncooperative tax havens in April 2009.
- After renegotiating more than 12 **double taxation agreements (DTA) based on OECD standards**, Switzerland was removed from the grey list in September 2009.
- But pressure was built up again, when it became clear, that Switzerland’s requirements were **too restrictive** for an effective exchange of information, and again Switzerland was threatened to be blacklisted.
- On 13 February 2011, the Federal Council decided to amend the requirements. Thus an exchange of information is now also possible without indicating a name. Exchange of information can now also take place, if a person or a bank can be identified using an account number or an insurance number. Fishing expeditions remain excluded.

Economy

Switzerland’s prosperity position after the financial crisis

- Switzerland has done remarkably well in coping with the global financial and economic crisis.
- In 2009, there was a **significant decline in growth** (-1.9 %). But for this year already **growth forecast is 2.1%**.
- Switzerland holds the **5th place** behind Hong Kong, the United States, Singapore and Sweden in the **world competitiveness** survey.
- Remaining challenge, especially for the Swiss exporting sector, is the **very strong value of the Swiss franc** against the Euro and many other currencies. But here again exporters are coping well with it.
- **Unemployment rate** fell to **3.4%** at the end of **February 2011**. Indicators for the labour market suggest a continued positive trend.

Fukushima and its impact on the discussion concerning atomic power plants (APP) in Switzerland

Key data

- Number of APPs on Swiss territory:
- 5 Atomic power plants stand on Swiss territory (58 in France, 17 in Germany):
 - Beznau (AG)-1 since 1969 (the oldest one)
 - Beznau-2 since 1972
 - Mühleberg (BE) since 1972
 - Gösgen (SO) since 1979
 - Leibstadt (AG) since 1984 (the newest one and the one with the highest electrical output: 1165 megawatt)

Quantity of energy generated by APPs

- 40 % of Swiss energy is nuclear energy.
- 55 % is hydropower.
- The rest comes mostly from garbage incineration plants.
- Only 0,6 % is generated by the new forms of renewable energy as wind, solar energy, and bio gas.

The future: Decisions taken by the federal council...

- ...the country’s five nuclear power stations will not

be replaced when they reach the end of their life-span.

- They will gradually be decommissioned by 2034. (Going on a lifespan of 50 years, means the first of the five nuclear power stations would close in 2019.)
- The 40% energy needs now supplied by the five nuclear power plants, shall be replaced by **hydro-electric power, renewable energy and combined gas plants among other methods**.
- The government’s decision on the future of nuclear power came days after an estimated **20,000 people had participated in the biggest anti-nuclear protest** in Switzerland for 25 years.
- The government’s recommendation will be **discussed in parliament** at the beginning of June and a final decision is expected in the middle of June.
- It is widely expected that **Swiss voters will have the final say** in a nationwide ballot in **2013 or 2014**.

2011 – AN ELECTION YEAR

1. Type of elections

Two types of elections:

- In October of this year, the People are going to elect the *members of the Swiss parliament* (2.1), both the National Council as well as the Council of States.
- And in December, this newly constituted United Federal Assembly will elect the seven members of the *Federal Council* (2.2).

2. The Swiss electoral system

2.1 Parliament

Switzerland has a **bicameral parliament**: the federal Chambers (National Council and Council of States), which together constitute the **united federal assembly**.

- Both chambers are **elected directly by the People** (every 4 years).
- In both instances, it is the cantons that are the electoral constituencies:

The National Council (also called “large chamber”, 200 seats)...

- ...represents the overall population.
- ...is elected according to standard **federal rules**.
- The number of deputies from a canton depends on its **population** as recorded in the last census (at least 1 seat guaranteed).
- Kt. ZH: 34 deputies (population of 1.4 Mio.); Kt. UR: 1 deputy (population of 35’000).

The Council of the States (“small chamber”, 46 seats)...

- ...represents the member states of the Confederation, i.e. the cantons.
- ...is elected according to regulations which **vary** from **canton** to canton.
- Irrespective of its population, each canton sends **two representatives** to the Council.

This system reflects the **two principles** on which the **structure of the state** is founded: the *democratic princi-*

ple, according to which every vote carries the same weight and the *federalist principle*, by which all cantons are treated equally.

Rules for Swiss living abroad

- Also Swiss living abroad can participate in elections and register on the electoral roll, either in your home commune or in your former commune of residence.
- This gives you the right to vote and **take part in elections** at federal level and **to be elected** to the National Council.
- However, depending on where you are registered, you may or may not be able to take part in elections to the *Council of states*. This is determined by cantonal law.

E-Voting possible for some Swiss living in New Zealand

- If you are registered with the cantons of AG, BE, FR, GE, GR, LU, NE, SO, SH, SG, TG or ZH you may cast your vote electronically (As most of the cantons are still testing e-voting, please check with your home commune).
- Federal authorities are pushing for e-voting: By 2012, next year, 50% of the Swiss living abroad should be able to cast their vote electronically.

2.2 Federal Council

After Parliament is newly constituted, it will elect the government, the seven members of the Federal Council.

They are elected individually by the united Federal assembly for a **four-year term** of office.

3. Impact of parliamentary elections on the composition of the Federal Council

The magic formula exists since 1959. Until recently the composition of the federal council remained unchanged:

2 seats for the Social Democrats
2 seats for the Free Democrats
2 seats for the Christian Democrats and
1 seat for the Swiss people's Party.

- This corresponded roughly to their share of vote.
- This composition of government remained **unchanged for 44 years**.

The **2003** national council elections saw the Swiss People's Party gain the largest share of the vote. No longer did it seem fair for them to have only 1 seat in government. Consequently two members of the Swiss People's Party were elected federal Councillors, at the expense of the Christian Democrats, who henceforward had to put up with only one seat in government.

However, in **2008** both Swiss People's Party members of government, Evelyne Widmer Schlumpf and Samuel Schmid changed allegiance to the newly-founded, very small Conservative Democratic Party **bdp**. The largest party, the Swiss People's Party, had no more representatives in government.

But shortly after Samuel Schmid - under a lot of pressure from his former party, the Swiss People's Party - retired (beginning 2009), and a representative of the Swiss People's Party, Defense Minister Ueli Maurer, was elected.

Today we have :

- 2 Social Democrats (Micheline Calmy-Rey, Simonetta Sommaruga),
- 2 Free Democrats (Didier Burkhalter, Johann Schneider-Amman),
- 1 Christian Democrat (Doris Leuthard),
- 1 Swiss People's party (Ueli Maurer) and
- 1 Conservative Democrat, Evelyne Widmer-Schlumpf.

Ongoing discussion

- It is unlikely that Evelyne Widmer-Schlumpf, despite being recognized for her good work, will be re-elected, for the simple reason that her party, the Conservative Democratic Party, does not have a share of vote large enough to claim a seat in government.
- Today, there is **heated discussion** regarding which party deserves 2 seats in the Federal Council.
- It is undisputed that the Social Democrats and the Swiss People's Party deserve two seats. But the **Free Democratic Party** and the **Christian Democrat People's Party** both claim the right for 2 seats.
- The **Conservative Democratic Party** wants to hold on to its seat, claiming Evelyne Widmer-Schlumpf is doing a good job.
- And, to make matters worse, also the **Green Liberals** are claiming one seat. It is expected that the Green Liberals will be doing very well in the upcoming elections and the larger their share of vote, the more they will ask for a seat in government.

All depends on the outcome of the parliamentary elections. So the elections are going to be interesting!

Switzerland's political landscape

- You might have read the last issue of the Swiss Review on Switzerland's political landscape. There it said that **Switzerland is shifting to the right politically**. The Swiss People's Party, already now having the largest share of vote, is becoming more and more powerful. Why is that?
- In the Swiss Review it was rightly stated, that in its constant election campaigning, the Swiss People's Party is handling two popular issues more astutely than others: immigration, foreigners, asylum and refugees on the one hand, and Switzerland's relationship with the EU on the other.
- Both issues are **interlinked**, since with the Bilateral Agreements I the free movement of persons and with the Bilateral Agreements II Schengen and Dublin were introduced.

SWITZERLAND AND THE EU

Just a few numbers:

- 22% of the Swiss population are foreigners. The large bulk of them, 2/3, come from EU States. And

- half a million Swiss live in EU countries.
- 80% of the imports come from the EU
- 60% of the exports go to the EU.

Switzerland has very close political and economic ties with the EU:

- It all started with the **Free Trade Agreement of 1972**, which created a free trade zone for industrial products.
- In 1999 a set of 7 bilateral agreements, the so called **Bilateral I**, were concluded, amongst them the free movement of persons, allowing Swiss and EU citizens to take up residence in any of the partner countries.

There has always been criticism with regard to the free movement of people, but with a view to the upcoming elections criticism has become louder and no longer comes only from the Swiss People's Party.

Yet we know that the migration to Switzerland contributed largely to mitigate the effects of the global economic and financial crises and, economically speaking, is beneficial to Switzerland.

In 2004, another set of 9 bilateral agreements, the so called **Bilateral II**, were concluded.

The Bilateral II consider more economic interests, but also extend cooperation **beyond economic affairs to important new political areas** including security and asylum (= the so called Schengen and Dublin agreements).

Cooperation in the fields of police, justice, asylum and migration (Schengen/Dublin) :

The **Schengen Agreement** facilitates travel for private individuals through the elimination of checks at the internal borders.

At the same time, a series of new measures have improved international cooperation between justice and police authorities to combat crime, like for example the Schengen Information System (SIS).

Lately, the Schengen System is being criticized by several EU Countries, due to the high influx of immigrants from North Africa. Some countries ask for amendments to the regulations, in order to allow them to put up border controls again or even to abolish the whole system. Until now, the only situation in which border controls can be reintroduced is when there is a **serious threat to public order**.

The so-called **Dublin cooperation** is designed to ensure that asylum seekers can only make one application for asylum in the "Dublin area". The Dublin criteria determine which state is responsible for processing an application for asylum in order to ensure an equitable sharing of the burden among Schengen signatory states.

Thanks to the electronic fingerprint database (Eurodac), persons who make more than one request for asylum can be identified and referred to the country responsible for processing their case. This eliminates the expense of multiple processing and reduces the burden on national asylum systems.

DRAWING THE BALANCE OF SWISS-KIWI RELATIONSHIP IN NEW ZEALAND

Close relations between Switzerland and New Zealand

- Relations between Switzerland and New Zealand are warm and close. We share **common interests** on almost all major issues – be it the environment, nuclear disarmament, free trade or rule of law.

So the cooperation on the multilateral level (meaning the UN, WTO, etc.) is manifold.

On the bilateral level, I am pleased to let you know that last year I signed an **agreement between Switzerland and New Zealand on sanitary measures**, applicable to trade in animals and animal products.

It means that New Zealand recognizes the Swiss sanitary measures and that Switzerland recognizes the New Zealand sanitary measures. This means that trade in raw milk cheese and Bündnerfleisch, dried beef, will be easier and safer.

The agreement is not yet in force. Once in force, we expect trade particularly in raw milk cheese to significantly increase. => better Fondue!

Unfortunately, on two other issues there has not been any progress:

- No progress was achieved with regard to **Swiss pensions**:

As the situation is now, second tier pensions (Pensionskasse) as well as the pension that is based on voluntary contributions (freiwillige AHV) is not deducted from the New Zealand pension.

What continues to be deducted is the pension that is based on mandatory contributions, the AHV.

Discussions with several ministries have not been successful and in the current budgetary situation New Zealand is in, it is highly unlikely that in the near future any progress can be achieved. Sole consolation: we are not the only ones. All European countries are facing the same problems.

- No progress could be achieved in reaching a **Working Holiday Agreement** that would allow young Swiss to come to New Zealand for travel and work and vice versa. There is no interest of the Swiss side in concluding such an agreement.

- Visa Waiver

After Switzerland became a member of the Schengen Agreement, there was a different understanding with regard to how long a Kiwi can stay in Switzerland, after having stayed in other Schengen countries.

I was very pleased to announce in November of last year that for Kiwis Switzerland's membership in the Schengen agreement did not change anything: **Regardless of how much time a Kiwi has spent in other Schengen countries, he is allowed to stay in Switzerland for the full 3 months**. I am pleased that this very liberal understanding of the existing treaties prevailed.

I hope you have enjoyed our journey into Swiss politics, and maybe you have also learned something. What is important is that you, as Swiss citizens, make use of your political rights. We Swiss are so lucky to have a say on almost everything, unlike citizens of other countries that I am in charge of. So do make use of your political rights; the Embassy is there to help you with registering.

Thank you.