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Embassy News -

Ambassador's Speech in Auckland

Those who attended the formal dinner of the Swiss Society AGM in Auckland on 3 June have heard the speech of our Ambassador Marion Weichelt Krupski on Swiss Politics during 2011-2012.

If you were not able to attend, you are able to access and read the speech on the Swiss Embassy's website (<http://www.eda.admin.ch/wellington>) and follow the link through to Embassy Wellington/Welcome Message. For those among you who do not have access to a computer/internet, the Embassy has kindly agreed to post out printed copies of the speech. Please refer to page 2 for relevant contact details. Following is a brief summary of the speech.

The Ambassador gave us an update of Swiss elections in 2011, reiterating the Swiss Governance model and describing the newly elected Federal Council (Bundesrat) and its political composition. Of interest were the voting patterns of Swiss living abroad, which are generally more liberal and green in comparison to voters living in Switzerland. More detail on this can be found in the June 2012 issue of the Swiss Review (www.revue.ch/en).

The speech covered the 10th anniversary of Switzerland's membership in the United Nations (UN), highlighting the fact that Switzerland has been a strong UN partner, with a clear commitment to many challenges the world faces today.

Financial matters were next. Switzerland is currently the 7th most important financial centre worldwide and under increasing international pressure to cooperate in the fight against tax offences. A Financial Centre Strategy issued by the Federal Council at the end of February 2012 aims for a credible, tax-compliant and competitive Swiss financial centre. The strategy includes a number of key actions, including fighting money laundering and market abuse, and implementing measures to ensure that Swiss banks only accept taxed money.

The speech then centred on Switzerland and the European Union (EU). It discussed existing bilateral agreements, focusing on that for the free movement of persons between Switzerland and any of the partner countries. It highlighted ongoing institutional questions about how to adjust these agreements to new developments in EU law.

The Ambassador talked about the 700,000 Swiss Citizen who have chosen to live abroad, mostly in Europe (60%). Some 170,000 live in the USA and 30,000 live in our region of Oceania. Three out of four Swiss living abroad possess dual nationality.

The Ambassador also noted the fact that the Swiss government is currently considering a Federal Law for Swiss Citizens abroad, together with one department with responsibility for all issues relating to Swiss citizens living abroad. In June, a parliamentary initiative to this end was signed by 31 out of 46 members of the Council of States (Federal Council).

Of note in this context is progress with successful trials for e-voting. An increasing number of cantons are being granted permission for e-voting, with priority given to Swiss living abroad. The ASO (Auslandschweizer Organisation - Organisation of the Swiss living abroad) plays an active role in the above two matters.

The Ambassador also spoke about Swiss - Kiwi relationships and the close cooperation where common interests are concerned, such as in the areas of the environment, human rights, disarmament, free trade and rule of law.

Despite recent talks between the former Ambassador Beat Nobs (now the head of the Asia/Pacific Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs) during his visit to New Zealand and the New Zealand Government, no further progress has been made regarding the non-deduction of the AHV (Swiss pension) from the New Zealand pension, nor are any changes likely to occur in the near future given the current budgetary situation in New Zealand.

The Ambassador commented that this does not apply to second tier Swiss pensions (Pensionskasse) nor to the voluntary AHV which are not deducted from the New Zealand pension. The same situation applies to all other European countries as well.

Lastly, the Ambassador noted the fact that no progress has been made on reaching a mutual Working Holiday Agreement for young New Zealand and Swiss people.

We all appreciated the Ambassador's effort to attend our dinner on her way back from an official engagement in Samoa and her update on political matters in Switzerland.



The new Federal Council (from left to right): Johann N. Schneider-Ammann (Department of Economic Affairs), Didier Burkhalter (Department of Foreign Affairs), Ueli Maurer (Vice-President, Department of Defence), Swiss President Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf (Department of Finance), Doris Leuthard (Department of the Environment, Transport, Energy and Communications), Simonetta Sommaruga (Department of Justice and Police), Alain Berset (Department of Home Affairs) and Federal Chancellor Corina Casanova.