



SWISS WITH US

NEWS & VIEWS



From the Embassy of Switzerland in the U.S.

August 2024

Washington, D.C. / Sunday, August 4, 2024

Dear Friends of Switzerland,

All good things must come to an end. After five years serving as the Ambassador of Switzerland to the United States of America, the most exciting chapter of my professional career so far ends today. This is the curse and the beauty of the nomadic life that a diplomat chooses: we get to see the most exhilarating places this planet has to offer, fall in love with them, and then are forced to move on to the next posting – to discover new exhilarating places!

During my time in the United States, I have learned more than I ever could have hoped for about this amazing country, its history, culture, and people. I have witnessed immense natural beauty, been inspired by groundbreaking research and entrepreneurship, and made friends for a lifetime. This was an unforgettable experience and I am proud and honored to have represented Switzerland in this fascinating nation.

Most importantly, the relationship between Switzerland and the U.S. is stronger than it ever has been. Now, don't worry – that's not going to change! I am proud to pass the baton to my successor, Dr. Ralf Heckner, who in his previous posting served as the Swiss Ambassador to India. Ambassador Heckner is a terrific colleague and a stellar diplomat and under his leadership, we most certainly will continue our series of successes in the United States.

My next destination is Brussels, where I will be the Ambassador of Switzerland to Belgium and Head of the Swiss Mission to NATO. Before I leave my desk in beautiful Washington, D.C., for a final time, please allow me to reminisce for a few minutes. While our activities in the U.S. during the last five years are truly too numerous to count and list, I want to highlight a selection of accomplishments that my team and I have achieved during my tenure.

Let me start with our bread and butter: political relations. This concerns first and foremost the bilateral political dialogue at all levels and in a wide range of fields, including very fruitful exchanges between the Swiss Parliament and the U.S. Congress. We are living in unprecedented times of geopolitical tensions. Yet, we have managed to make our contributions as a responsible international partner. This year, Switzerland hosted the Summit on Peace in Ukraine that was attended by world leaders including Vice President Kamala Harris. Within the framework of Switzerland's good offices, the Embassy supported the implementation of the protecting power mandate to represent U.S. interests in Iran. And at our offices in Washington, D.C., we have provided platforms for many of the most pressing conversations of our time, hosting discussions on topics ranging from cybersecurity and digital policy to the strengthening of democratic systems – at an event attended by USAID administrator Samantha Power – and criminal justice reform.

Facilitating complex legal agreements is at the core of the work done at an Embassy. We have managed to provide legal securities in various sectors during my ambassadorship in Washington, D.C. I would like to

highlight the new payment mechanism for humanitarian supplies to Iran (Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement (SHTA)); the witnessing of the creation of the Fund for the Afghan People; and the recovery of three stolen medieval books from the U.S. to Switzerland.

An area that fills me with pride is our economic footprint in the U.S. In 2021, the United States became Switzerland's most important export destination – and they have remained in the top position ever since. Close to 18% of Swiss exports come to this country. Further, Switzerland is the seventh most important foreign direct investor in the U.S., with over \$300 billion in investments, largely supporting very well-paid jobs with an average salary of \$110,000.

In research and development, we are even stronger: Switzerland is the third-largest investor in the U.S. in this field. This makes us particularly well-equipped to deepen our cooperation with the U.S. in complex areas including infrastructure and green technology, and in emerging fields like quantum computing. Behind the scenes, we do everything we can to enable Swiss businesses to thrive in the U.S. Our efforts include aiding the pharmaceutical sector with our new Mutual Recognition Agreement in the area of Good Manufacturing Practice for medicinal products, currently negotiating the revision of the Double Taxation Agreement between our countries, and signing the new FACTA agreement on the mutual exchange of financial account data.

Our economic impact relies on the brilliant minds trained at Swiss educational institutes and enterprises. There are three recent scientific agreements with the U.S. that I would like to point out. We are immensely proud of our vocational education system in Switzerland and were very happy to have Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin and representatives of the Departments of Labor, Education, and Commerce signed our renewed Memorandum of Understanding on Vocational Education and Training. While apprenticeships are an important historic component of Swiss culture, we are also looking at the industries of the future. Our Joint Statement of Cooperation in Quantum Information Science and Technology will help both countries pursue technological breakthroughs and create the workforce of tomorrow. But the world is not enough! As our new Swiss astronaut Marco Sieber is getting ready to take Switzerland to the stars, we joined the Artemis Accords, regulating the exploration of celestial bodies, including the Moon.

While we were negotiating these important texts, our scientific office also had the pleasure of welcoming some of the brightest thinkers and researchers of today at our Embassy. Yes, talking to politicians and diplomats can be fun, but few things beat having Bill Nye (the Science Guy) explain the importance of space exploration to you! After hosting Mr. Nye and hearing world-renowned astronomer and Nobel Prize laureate Didier Queloz explain the nature of planets outside of our solar system to me, I will never look at the night sky the same way again.

But before I get too enthralled by the possibilities offered by future scientific exploits, I must remind myself of some of the challenges which we are facing today. These uncertain times underscore the importance of our defense and security forces. The Swiss Armed Forces are deepening their ties with the U.S. Armed Forces in significant ways. Switzerland is in the process of joining the National Guard's State Partnership Program. This prospective undertaking would further military cooperation between Switzerland and the United States and encourage people-to-people ties. Right here in Washington, D.C., an officer of the Swiss Armed Forces recently graduated from the prestigious National Defense University. Furthermore, the Swiss Armed Forces are working towards increased collaboration by engaging with the J-7 Directorate for Joint Force Development of the Joint Staff of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Our defensive cooperation goes even further. During my ambassadorship, Switzerland acquired 36 F-35A aircrafts and five Patriot fire units from U.S. manufacturers. The accompanying offset agreement stipulates that U.S. manufacturers will conduct significant business with Swiss industries in fields including defense, aviation, and space. Therefore, these acquisitions not only strengthen our defense systems but also have positive effects on crucial technology sectors in Switzerland and the United States – truly a mutually beneficial agreement.

Are you a Swiss citizen who came to our Embassy to renew your passport or are you from another country and visited us to receive a visa? You were not alone. Our chancery team has worked tirelessly in the last five years: our team issued over 9000 visas, over 4000 Swiss identity documents – including more than 700 during two visits to Chicago with the mobile passport station – and over 800 laissez-passers which allowed U.S. citizens to travel to Switzerland during the COVID-19 pandemic for important reasons despite travel restrictions. Connecting transatlantic families and offering people the opportunity to visit my beautiful home country is one of the pleasures of this job.

During my tenure, we closed our Embassy building for important renovations, spent some time in a temporary office, and finally returned to our home base two years ago. At a time when the global supply chains were still affected by the aftermaths of the pandemic, renovating a high-security building was not an easy undertaking. Now, I am happy to welcome our guests and our chancery visitors to our new and improved Embassy building.

Most of our diplomatic work at the Embassy happens behind closed doors – but if you have interacted with me before, you will know how much I love talking to a crowd! Our public engagements were some of my favorite moments in D.C. We organized three editions of our flagship Soirée Suisse, our largest annual event featuring around 1,500 invited guests, including government officials, diplomats, and journalists. Beyond our tried and true Soirée Suisse events, I was very excited to twice host [an afterparty for the White House Correspondents Dinner with TIME Magazine](#), welcoming the celebrated members of the press, Hollywood celebrities, Washington powerbrokers, and even Doug Emhoff, the Second Gentleman of the United States. And in 2022, we hosted the National Governors Association winter meeting, with 31 U.S. governors in attendance. I cannot overstate the importance of the connections a humble diplomat like myself makes at these events, they are crucial to the strength of our bilateral relationship.

Yes, I enjoy talking about Swiss humanitarian and economic values, but we also have a strong cultural identity that I love promoting to my U.S. colleagues and friends. In my time here, we have collaborated with many of the most-esteemed cultural institutions and museums in the region, including the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Institute, [the Phillips Collection](#), and the Baltimore Museum of Art. We have organized concerts, [showcased films](#), promoted our four languages, [cheered for our athletes](#), and co-hosted [an annual 5K race with Swiss running shoe company On](#). Sharing our culture with a U.S. audience has been a joy. Sure, cheese, chocolate, and watches are great, but our culture has so much more to offer!

As you can tell by now, I love talking about everything we do here at the Embassy – and sometimes, it can be hard to keep track of all the great things we do here. Finally, we have an excellent way to showcase our achievements: last year, we launched [SWISS IMPACT](#). On our new website, we highlight the work that Switzerland does in the U.S. in the fields of innovation, sustainability, economic promotion, international partnership, and culture. This website is not only for Embassy activities; here, we showcase everything that we do across our representational network in the U.S. Come take a look and you will find that there is even more that we achieve in this country beyond the items I highlighted in this letter.

Alright, the driver is honking his horn outside – it is time to go to the airport and head to Brussels! Before I leave, let me thank you one final time for your support of our country and your interest in everything we at the Embassy do to make Switzerland and the United States the strong partners that we are. On the next issue of his newsletter, you will hear from my successor, Dr. Ralf Heckner – and, trust me, you are in good hands. *Merci et au revoir.*

Sincerely,

Jacques Pitteloud



Jacques Pitteloud was the Ambassador of Switzerland to the United States of America from September 2019 until August 4, 2024. He is designated to become the Ambassador of Switzerland to Belgium and Head of the Swiss Mission to NATO next month.



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