



Event Review

**Luncheon with Federal Councillor
Johann Schneider-Ammann
6th of September 2013
at the Intercontinental Hotel, OR Tambo**

A special Luncheon, in conjunction with the Embassy of Switzerland, was held on the 6th of September 2013, on the occasion of the visit of the Federal Councillor with a business and science delegation, at the Intercontinental Hotel, OR Tambo.

SwissCham President Thomas C. Hippele welcomed the select guests who had come to hear the Federal Councillor's message.

After a delicious starter and main course, Thomas Hippele introduced the guest speaker, Johann Schneider-Ammann.

As head of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER), Federal Councillor Johann N. Schneider-Ammann is one of the seven members of the Federal Council, Switzerland's cabinet.



Thomas C Hippele
President
SwissCham Southern Africa – South Africa Chapter

The EAER consists of two State Secretariats, three Federal Offices and other administrative units. The State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) is the federal government's centre of expertise for all core issues relating to economic and trade policy. Its aim is to ensure sustainable economic growth by putting in place the necessary regulatory and economic conditions. As head of the EAER, Federal Councillor Johann N. Schneider-Ammann is responsible for the country's optimal foreign economic policy positioning. At the multilateral level, the focus is on Switzerland's commitments within the World Trade Organisation (WTO). At the same time, Switzerland also seeks to safeguard its interests on the basis of bilateral free trade agreements. At the national level, the EAER establishes the regulatory framework and economic conditions which provide Swiss businesses and foreign companies located in Switzerland with sound prospects for the future. In addition, one of the main aims is to create a favourable environment for the creation of new jobs through flexible labour market conditions. This includes easier access to the labour market for young people and women as well as older workers.

The State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) also falls under Johann N. Schneider-Ammann's area of responsibility. The three fields of research, education and innovation are extremely important for our society and for Switzerland's economic performance. In close cooperation with the cantons, as well as the private sector, education at all levels is structured in such a way that all qualifications lead to viable jobs, and that the diverse needs of vocational and professional education and training, universities of applied sciences, universities and the ETH domain are covered. Two further

key areas are international cooperation within research programmes and the Space Affairs Division, which is an important partner for industry.

The Federal Office for Agriculture is also part of the EAER. Johann N. Schneider-Ammann will be implementing four key priorities through the 'Agriculture Policy 2014-2017' plan: safe food production, efficient use of resources, safeguarding vital rural space and further encouraging business-mindedness in the agricultural and food sectors.

Before taking up his position as head of the EAER on 1 November 2010, Johann N. Schneider-Ammann was a member of the National Council for eleven years for the FDP.The Liberals. During this time he was a member of the Committee for Economic Affairs and Taxation.

Federal Councillor Schneider-Ammann was born in 1952 and is an electrical engineer by profession (Dipl. El. Ing. ETH). Before his election to the Federal Council he was president and delegate of the Ammann Group. Johann N. Schneider-Ammann is married and the father of two grown children.



HE Federal Councillor
Johann Schneider-Ammann

Dear members of SwissCham Southern
Africa South Africa Chapter,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to have direct contact with representatives of Swiss companies in South Africa, as I know the value of such direct exchanges between representatives from the Government and the business community. They offer the opportunity to get a clearer picture about the business

community. They offer the opportunity to get a clearer picture about the business environment, the opportunities as well as the challenges of a specific country.

I was told that SwissCham in South Africa is not an Old Boys Club but an efficient and useful institution for networking and establishing links to South African members of the Government and other eminent people of the South African business community. The list of invited Ministers to SwissCham business luncheons or dinners is remarkable. I also know that you raise your voice in defending Swiss business interests in this country as you have done for example with your submission regarding the reform of the B-BBEE code.

My visit to South Africa is the first combined mission with a business and a science delegation and the consequence of the recent integration of the fields economy, education and research under the same roof of a Federal Department. The synergies between economy, education and research are evident. All the elements are needed – education, training, science and innovation, from where the transformation into concrete commercial activity is given impetus to our economy. Switzerland's unique resource is it's human and intellectual capital. Therefore it has to be always at the forefront of research and

education since these are the bases for the success of our competitive and innovative economy. I am glad to hear that Swiss companies like Novartis, Nestlé and Roche are also investing in science and research in this country, be it within or outside of our common Swiss-South African Joint Research Programme.

As you all know, Switzerland is one of the few European countries still showing economic growth, a low unemployment rate, almost no inflation as well as a reasonably low public debt rate. There are a lot of reasons for this prosperous economic environment. One of the strengths of the Swiss economy is its openness based on sound, stable and liberal framework conditions. Another asset lies in the quality of our education system. Switzerland is the home of internationally renowned universities but also has a well performing vocational training system. I am pleased to hear that this system draws a lot of attention in South Africa. This vocational system is certainly an important factor for the low unemployment rate in my country because it leaves it up to the labour market to adjust accordingly to the needs of the economy. We can only encourage South Africa to reinforce its endeavour to reform the field of vocational training. At this point, I would like to take the opportunity and thank all Swiss companies who are involved in the public private partnership programme of SSACI, the Swiss – South African Cooperation Initiative. This initiative is providing financial and technical support to vocational skills training and job creation projects for out-of-school youth from formerly disadvantaged communities.



Switzerland and South Africa have established a strategic partnership with a big range of fields of cooperation. From the transition phase until today, Switzerland has always contributed to complement South Africa's own endeavors, in the beginning with a development cooperation programme. In the last years the focus shifted to economic development cooperation. Since 1996 this cooperation has committed 800 million Rand to joint projects and programmes. Between

2013 and 2016 a further 650 million Rand are available. The cooperation with South Africa is focused on three pillars:

1. support of a more competitive economy;
2. support of a climate friendly and low carbon industry; and
3. support of South Africa as a regional center of expertise.

There is a lot of potential for Swiss companies in South Africa. A sound framework and legal security is key for Swiss - as well as for foreign investors in general - in order to establish long term cooperation. This is key in our foreign economic policy and also the message I have given to Minister of Trade and Industry, Rob Davies, during my meeting with him yesterday. On the governmental level, we continue to work with our South African counterparts to maintain sound framework conditions.

I am now keen for an open discussion with you to learn more about your experience, your challenges and the opportunities to be found in South Africa, the Federal Councillor concluded.



Daniela Maurer for
SwissCham Southern Africa – South Africa Chapter



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