

## SWISS AMBASSADOR EXCLUSIVELY FOR ADN

# “Swiss- Albanian Bilateral Ties Have Been Intensifying Recently”

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“The bilateral relations between Switzerland and Albania have been intensifying recently. This might be partially due to the 25th anniversary of Swiss Presence in Albania that we are celebrating this year. Switzerland opened its Embassy in Tirana in 1992,” has said the Ambassador of Switzerland in Albania, Christoph Graf.

In an exclusive interview for Albanian Daily News the Ambassador described the atmosphere that the National Day (August 1, 1994) creates throughout his country.

“It is the day that reminds citizens of the origin of the Swiss federal state and the unique political system of direct democracy,” said Mr. Graf.

Speaking of the global landscape in the world the Swiss Ambassador said that it is changing in an accelerated and hardly predictable way. “China, the US and the UK are in a process of repositioning themselves, EU needs to pull together. So far Switzerland has remained an island of stability. But we are highly interconnected to the world, we earn every second Swiss Franc abroad,” he pointed out.

The Ambassador, Graf spoke also on the Western Balkan which receives special attention in Switzerland. “It is a neighboring region with a considerable diaspora. My government invests more than a 100 million Swiss francs yearly in this region to contribute to a stable, peaceful and prosperous development. We support the countries’ efforts towards European integration,” Switzerland’s top diplomat in Tirana said in the interview that follows:

**- Your Excellency, what is the significance of the National Day for the Swiss people, and what is the history behind it as it has started to be celebrated officially as such since August 1, 1994?**

- The Swiss National Day marks the legendary oath of the “Rütli” in 1291. Three Cantons in the heart of the Swiss Alps swore to assist each other in a solidarity pact. That was the beginning of today’s Swiss Confederation.

Until 1994, each canton



could decide about the status of the National Day independently, in line with the spirit of a federal state. So some cantons chose to keep it as a full working day, others offered half a day of holiday. Only since 1994 it is a full day off for the entire country.

**- Mr. Ambassador, how is the Swiss National Day traditionally celebrated? Which are some of the peculiarities of the celebrations in different parts of the country making them a special attraction of tourists?**

- Houses and squares are decorated with flags, flags that represent the towns, the cantons and the country. People gather in the evening to watch fireworks, listen to music and speeches and eat grilled sausages. Children move around in little parades with paper lanterns. In alpine towns you see bonfires and more traditional activities like flag throwers and yodeling.

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**- In the frame of such an occasion could you please say a few words on the political, economic and social situation of Switzerland taking of course into consideration**

**certain issues like global economic and financial crisis, massive emigration to Europe, rising international terrorism, Brexit, a US with a new president, Mr. Donald Trump etc?**

- The global landscape is changing in an accelerated and hardly predictable way. China, the US and the UK are in a process of repositioning themselves, EU needs to pull together. So far Switzerland has remained an island of stability. But we are highly interconnected to the world, we earn every second Swiss Franc abroad.

Switzerland is located at the heart of Europe and is part of the Schengen agreement on free movement of persons in Europe. We want to contribute to prosperity and stability through an open economy, solidarity and dialogue.

We do this also through multilateral organizations such as the UN, the OECD and the OSCE; the “Humanitarian City” of Geneva is one of our assets.

I am pleased that a Swiss diplomat colleague, Thomas Greminger, was accepted last week as Secretary General of the OSCE by 57 member states. This is a sign of trust to Swiss neutrality that we take very seriously - to contribute to rebuild trust among nations.

**- Switzerland has always paid special attention to the Western Balkans being present with its overall support for peace, stability, economic development and promotion of democracy. How does official Bern see the latest move, that is the creation of the WB 6 regional trade market, backed by EU in the frame of the Berlin Process which was okayed in the Trieste Summit on July 12?**

- The Western Balkan receives special attention in Switzerland. It is a neighboring region with a considerable diaspora. My government invests more than a 100 million Swiss francs yearly in this region to contribute to a stable, peaceful and prosperous development. We support the countries’ efforts towards European integration. It is important that the Western Balkan countries move governance reforms and the regional integration agenda forward rigorously. RYCO (the Regional Youth Cooperation Office) and the Western Balkan Funds (WBF) are encouraging homegrown regional initiatives that merit to be pursued. Switzerland encourages initiatives that build more bridges, economic ties, transport network and energy cooperation in the Western Balkans.

**- Mr. Ambassador would you please make a wrap up of the overall bilateral cooperation between Switzerland and Albania, and which are some of the projects foreseen for the future?**

- The bilateral relations between Switzerland and Albania have been intensifying recently. This might be partially due to the 25th anniversary of Swiss Presence in Albania that we are celebrating this year. Switzerland opened its Embassy in Tirana in 1992.

Several high level visits took place during the past months, e.g. the Swiss speaker of Parliament travelled to Tirana as well as the Director General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC); Prime Minister Edi Rama paid an historical official visit to the President of Switzerland Doris Leuthard in Bern.

The Swiss Cooperation Programme will continue to support the Government’s dynamic reform agenda – with a focus on implementation. We will stay engaged primarily in strengthening municipalities, vocational education and energy security. In the coming years we might extend our cooperation in good governance and transparency issues.

**- It is noticed that special place is set to the cultural presence of Switzerland by your Embassy in Albania. Which is the aim of such endeavor, and is their reciprocity in it between the two countries?**

- Culture is an excellent vehicle for fostering peaceful relations between people, communities and states. Cultural activities offer space for fruitful exchange among unusual stakeholders.

Swiss Cooperation dedicates one percent of its activities to culture, the so called “cultural percent”.

Current cultural activities include a joint Swiss Albanian film-project with the Marubi Film School in Tirana about Albania’s communist past as well as support to the jazz festival Tirana with the Thomas Lüthi Trio from Zürich.