

Switzerland, a Neutral State since 1815

The Swiss Confederation with a surface of 41,285 km² was founded in 1848 and its politics is based on federalism. It is a federal state with three political levels: federal government, canton and municipality and its major principles are decentralized division of power and solving issues at the lowest possible level. Solidarity is shown in the fiscal transfers from richer to poor regions.

Switzerland, which has 8.04 million inhabitants, is well-known for its politics based on direct democracy whose instruments are: popular initiative, optional referendum, mandatory referendum. On average, four popular votes on a wide range of issues are held every year and the voting age is 18.

Legislative is made up of Parliament with National Council (lower house, 200 members of parliament); Council of States (upper house, 2 members of parliament per canton), while the executive (government) consists of Federal Council: 7 members from several Swiss political parties. Federal Chancellery: Assists and advises the Federal Council. Federal Chancellor is often referred to as the “eighth federal councillor”.

As far as foreign policy is concerned Switzerland is a member of various international organizations: EFTA (since 1960), Council of Europe (since 1963), OSCE (since 1975), the United Nations (since 2002). Swiss-EU relations are governed by a series of bilateral agreements, which allow Switzerland to ...

see on page 2

CHRONOLOGY

**Swiss- Albanian
Relations, from
1922 to the Present**

PAGE 2

25 Years of Swiss Presence in Albania



Swiss Ambassador Christoph Graf's welcome speech at ceremony of commemoration of 25th Anniversary of Swiss presence in Albania

On the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the opening of the Swiss representation in Tirana in 1992, the Swiss Embassy started on Tuesday, 12th of September, a number of activities to commemorate the event, which will last until September 14, 2017. In his welcoming speech, Ambassador Christoph Graf underlined that the links between the two countries have strengthened and increased since 1992. As Mr Graf stressed, Albania is a priority country for Swiss Development Cooperation, and Switzerland continuously supports Albania on its road towards Europe.

Mr. Christian Schmed, Deputy Head of Mission in Albania (1992- 1997) and Mr. Francis Cousin, Swiss Ambassador in Albania (2000-2002), brought back their memories as the first senior envoys to Albania.

Afterwards there was a panel discussion and video statements under the motto: 25 years- Achievements and Challenges. The speakers were Eglantina Gjermeni, Minister of Urban Development, Voltana Ademi, Mayor of Shkodra, Brian William, UN Resident Coordinator in Albania, Martin Woker, Former NZZX Correspondent for Southeast Europe, Zurich etc. On that occasion, a reception was organized by

the Ambassador Graf during which remarks were made by Mr. Nicholas Bruhl, Assistant State of the Federal Department for Foreign Affairs, and Mr. Ditmir Bushati, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

On Wednesday the programme focused on strengthening of bilateral economic relations, while the launch of Albanian-Swiss Chamber of Commerce was announced. Thursday is the last day of commemoration, which will be concluded with the screening of film “Dealing with the Past”, realized by the students of Academy of Film and Multimedia Marubi. An interesting roundtable follows.



CHRISTIAN SCHMED
FORMER AMBASSADOR

**Albania Rising from the
Rubble of Dictatorship**

PAGE 3



FRANCIS COUSIN
FORMER DEPUTY AMBASSADOR

**Let Us Learn More
About Each-other**

PAGE 2



CHRISTOPH GRAF
AMBASSADOR

**Be Proactive, Stand
Up for Public Causes**

PAGE 4

conduct a policy of openness and close collaboration with its European neighbors. Switzerland has been a neutral state since 1815.

With regard to economy Switzerland has a liberal market system. It is a major importer and exporter of goods and services and European Union (EU) is the most important trade partner. Well-developed industry and service provision (high-quality goods). There is a high level of international competitiveness and it is significant its high capacity for technological innovation.

Responsibility for education is shared between the federal authorities, the Cantons and the communes. Decentralized school system. Compulsory schooling (9 years): Primary and lower secondary Post-compulsory schooling: Upper secondary schooling based on a "dual system": Choice between vocational training routes (apprenticeship) and general education routes (preparation for the Matura) 60% of young people opt for the vocational training route. "Bologna" system is in all Swiss universities (Bachelor & Masters degree programmes). UAS (Universities of Applied Sciences) education. 37% of 25- to 64-year olds are university graduates. 50% of students are women.

In the meantime this country is well-known for its linguistic diversity having four national languages: German 64.9%, French 22.6%, Italian 8.3% and Rumantsch 0.5% while non-official languages 9%. The cultural diversity is strongly influenced by European neighbors.

The culture of Switzerland's linguistic regions is influenced by neighboring countries. Geography helps shape the cultural identity of Switzerland's regions. Foreign residents made up around 23% of the population (children: over 25%). Foreign residents from Europe are over 85%. Foreign residents born in Switzerland are around 25%. Naturalized Swiss nationals amount to around 11%. 732,000 Swiss live abroad. Swiss foreign population by nationality in percentage is as follows: Italy 15.6, Germany 15.2, Portugal 12.7, France 5.6, Serbia 5.3, Kosovo 4.2, Turkey 3.8, Spain 3.7, Macedonia 3.3, Great Britain 2.1, and others 28.5.

Switzerland is well known of its over 1100 museums. The annual visitor numbers

FORMER SWISS AMBASSADOR FRANCIS COUSIN

Albania and Its People Deserve to Be Better Known

"My best memories are related to several tours which gave me the opportunity to enjoy the warm hospitality of the Albanian people and to discover the natural beauty of the country"



Former Ambassador Cousin's book on his Albanian experience

"Albania and Albanian people deserve to be better known, so let's learn more about each other. Visiting Albania is a unique opportunity to that end," former Swiss Ambassador Francis Cousin who served in Albania from 2000 to 2002 told Albanian Daily News in an exclusive interview:

- Your Excellency, in the first place what can you tell us with what impressions did you come to Albania after a troubled decade in this Balkan country?

- I had a first taste of Albania a year earlier, during a short mission to Tirana in May 1999. So I was eager to see more of the country, to learn more about the Albanians, their culture and their language.

- A new millennium started. Did you think that Albania would take a more positive course of change, and, in your opinion, how would better ties with democratic countries like Switzerland influence in the further democratization of that country?

- I am now a private person and my answer reflects my personal opinion. After a troubled decade as you mentioned, the expectation had to be commensurate with a context that was still fragile at the time. As a foreign observer, if you are in a country for a limited number of years, you are inclined to expect changes for the better to happen at a fast pace. In practice, transition not only to democracy, but to an entirely new economic system and new methods of management is a complex process that requires time. Implementing a democratic form of governance is an ambitious endeavor. As Winston Churchill put it eighty years ago: "No one pretends

that democracy is perfect or all wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time..."

Personally, having observed elections closely in quite a number of countries, I would say that in order to be successful, a democratization process needs to be fully supported by the people and the political leadership. Democracy cannot be imposed from outside. Striving to reach a consensus rather than confrontation is part of the DNA in Switzerland's political life. In the case of Albania, Ambassador Christoph Graf certainly will be able to give you a more specific answer than me.

- Which have been some of the best and worst times during your tenure in Tirana?

- My best memories are related to several tours in Albania, be it in connection with bilateral development projects financed by the Swiss Government or for leisure. They gave me the opportunity to enjoy the warm hospitality of the Albanian people and to discover the natural beauty of the country: for instance, Llogara Pass, Dhërmi, Lake Koman, Pogradec... Not to forget "Divjakë-Karavasta" National Park that was shown to us by Professor Taulant Bino. A truly special experience was at the very beginning of my mission, when my wife and I visited a hospital that was being renovated with the support of the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development in Lezhë: we saw a kind of improvised altar where a statuette of the Virgin Mary, mother of God for the Christians, was placed next to the Coran, in our eyes a testimony of religious toler-

ance that fortunately prevails in Albania...

As for the worst time, life is such that we tend to forget bad moments and remember only the best ones... But to be frank, I must say, for instance, that I was rather unhappy when the electric light and the heating went off again and again due to "s'ka drita" (power cut) ... The positive side of it is that Switzerland supplied improved turbines for the Fierza Hydroelectric Station, which gave me a first-hand opportunity to visit the plant and then to take the ferry on beautiful Koman Reservoir.

- You have written a book on the profession of a diplomat where you have dedicated one chapter to your time in Albania. How did your experiences contribute to your life as a diplomat?

- There are many clichés about diplomats! They are generally seen as smartly dressed people spending most of their time at receptions, talking while holding a glass in their hand... Former Prime Minister Edward Heath is quoted to have said that a diplomat is somebody who thinks twice before saying nothing. In fact, networking is essential for a diplomat, thus the importance of being present at public events. But this part of the job comes on top of the work that a diplomat is doing day after day. The purpose of my book is precisely to describe what the work of diplomats consists of, based on personal experiences on several continents. Their work encompasses a broad scope, both geographically and in terms of contents. That is why my book's title is "Métier sans frontières" (Profession without borders).

- Mr. Ambassador, as a sea-

soned diplomat and also close to the Swiss-Albanian friendship association my question is how do you consider Albanians' role in the Balkans, a region known in the past as the powder keg of Europe?

- My answer to your question is again that of a private person. In the Western Balkans, from an ethno-linguistic point of view, Albanians are the second largest population. Consequently, they represent an important factor in the region, due in particular to the fact that significant numbers of Albanians are living outside Albania, in countries that were part of Yugoslavia in former times. In fact, as we know, more Albanians are outside Albania than inside. During my mission in Tirana, an armed conflict arose in neighboring Macedonia, a situation that had the ingredients of the powder keg you are referring to. In that tense period, Albania was seen as a moderating factor in the region. Fortunately, enough, the Ohrid Framework Agreement ended this armed conflict and set the groundwork for improving the rights of ethnic Albanians.

- Do you come often to Albania and what is your message to your compatriots on this people and country?

- This is my first visit after completing my mission in Albania. Not that I did not wish to come back, it just happened that way. My message to my compatriots is as earlier mentioned: Albania and Albanian people deserve to be better known, so let's learn more about each other. Visiting Albania is a unique opportunity to that end. In my book, this is part of the message that readers will find in the chapter related to my time in Albania.

The first thing that the former Deputy Ambassador, Christian Schmed, who served in Albania from 1992 to 1997 being the first official senior diplomat posted in Tirana, did when I met him on September 11, 2017 was to give a gift to me: "The Unforgettable Albania", a book written by him on Albania and his experience.

"If you really need my small steps in Albania you have absolutely everything in it. The book has 30 short stories of my experience in this country," said Ambassador Schmed. As a matter of fact, this interview is sort of a 'crash course' through his book.

- It is a privilege Mr. Ambassador to have the special opportunity to share your memories of those times of historical changes after more than two decades when duty brought you to Albania in 1992. First of all, which are your impressions when you arrived in Tirana?

- To answer to this question the best solution would be that I make you a small gift, which is a book I wrote headlined "The Unforgettable Albania", and if you really need my small steps in Albania you have absolutely everything in it. The book has 30 short stories of my experience in this country.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bern told me that I had the choice to be posted either in Latvia or Albania. I chose Albania for three reasons: the first had to do with the southern climate which was more with my liking; the second reason was that I was posted in Algeria where I knew the (former) Ambassador, Llesh Kola, and when he left Algiers I told him that I will follow him in a couple of months. And the third reason was that I was eager to know a country of which I did not have previous knowledge.

So I came here starting my career in Albania at Hotel Dajti. And my first impression was an unusual scene that I witnessed from the balcony of my room: I heard a noise from outside and when I went out I saw from there. It



FORMER DEPUTY AMBASSADOR, CHRISTIAN SCHMED

Rising from the Rubble of Dictatorship

The Swiss diplomat who witnessed the fall of Hoxha's statue and the "Pyramid" crisis of 1997: Conversing with Mr Schmed about Albania over a quarter century later

was the evening stroll of the inhabitants of Tirana and they greeted each other, stopped for one minute talking a little bit and that was one of the first remaining impressions on Albania. No cars, but a crowd of people peacefully and friendly going up and down the street "Deshmoret e Kombit". It was easy to communicate with people in Tirana in English, French, Italian or Greek. I can tell that I am really getting interested in the Albanian language. But the hardest problem was to find a house, which, anyway, was resolved.

- Which are your impressions when the statute of the late communist ruler, Enver Hoxha was toppled down?

I was here when people made a rope and threw it on the bust of the former communist leader. I saw the event and that was a real important moment for me because the crowd cried but there were a lot that were suspicious. I had a neighbor having three daughters and the mother of them was concerned of their safety as, according to her, they were safer before. She was not sure if they would not have any security problems.

I can say that what hap-

pened in Albania was not a change due to the interior situation, it was rather a change from the outside. Even (former president) Ramiz Alia or other ministers tried to stop it a little bit but it was no longer possible because the things were moving like a French saying goes the 'Street pushes'. Nothing could stop the change. I can imagine that there might have been any quarrels between different people at that time. A year later, an Albanian friend told me about the event that rains fell and wind blows on the pedestal, but life continued. The eruption of the popular frustration, as we saw it in other countries, could have been harsher in Albania.

- Which is your opinion on the course of events during the first years of the process of the introduction of pluralism in Albania?

- I am of the opinion that everything is possible in Albania because the people are strong. And the people have fantasy, and what they could not do during the communist regime they could do it now. I know the Albania of the dictatorship only in theory, but I have followed the country through the turmoil of chang-

es since the 1991-1992 period.

The change of the daily life started in a manner which was almost invisible. As a matter of fact, the private initiatives were the first signs. I can mention some like the optic shops, shoes shops, fashion dresses appeared in the market, bakeries. House utilities and other domestic utensils started to enter the country from different places. And the number of cars was growing rapidly in a country where when I went for the first time, there were so few!

- You have been in Tirana when the pyramid schemes collapsed. How do you those events come to your memory now in 2017?

- The turmoil caused by the collapse of the 'pyramids' in the spring of 1997 remains unforgettable in my memory. Albania was engulfed by a dangerous fever, and every day the craziest words circulated on spectacular percentages of profits. But the vicious cycle started to narrow. Despite the general euphoria about the earnings, it was felt a vague worry that things could not continue in that way. The awakening from the beautiful dream of earning with much sweat was painful

and brutal, and the reaction of those who lost was violent. I will never forget the cabins of guards in front of embassies which were abandoned by police, the spectacle of bullets being fired from everywhere. I remember the evacuation of four Swiss social employees who had been blocked in the north. Albania was paralyzed leading it to destruction. Could 'pyramids' have been stopped? Even today the answer to that question remains a very difficult hesitation.

- Which are your impressions on Albanians, especially on this occasion: the 25th anniversary of the Swiss presence in Albania?

- Albanians are strong and good soldiers, but people felt at the time of the overthrow of dictatorship that they had had enough and they wanted their families to be secure. I think that was an experience, it was lack of rule of law. But I am happy that Albanians did not exaggerate.

I have left my diplomatic service ten years ago, but I come twice a year with groups of Germans, French, Swiss people and we have made botanic trips; Albania is fantastic in this field.

I left behind a people that have become so dear to me and my wife. Albania is my second country. In my humble view dialogue is important in both camps including youth and old Albanians because both generations are clever people. They know languages, they have a fantastic practical sense. But they have still a long way to go and this is a long process. People cannot change overnight.

We felt at home in Albania because it became clearly to us that we were welcomed and it is not difficult to feel well in Albania because its citizens are good, gentle, friendly people. I think that the diplomatic and technical relations between Switzerland and Albania will go on. And it will always be our pleasure to come here and continue to foster this relationship because one day and you can see now the Swiss people are coming here as tourists. Albania is to discover!

SWISS AMBASSADOR TO ALBANIA CHRISTOPH GRAF

Progress Comes When Each Individual Takes Up Responsibility

I encourage the people of Albania to be more proactive and to stand up for public causes, Ambassador Graf says



"I encourage the people of Albania to be more proactive and to stand up for public causes. Albania can only progress if each individual takes up responsibility to voice their concerns and to contribute constructively to solving the issues this society faces," the Swiss Ambassador to Albania, Christoph Graf has said.

"As government representative, I see Albania as an important country for our foreign policy in the Balkans. I appreciate its constructive role to promote regional integration," said Ambassador Graf in the following interview for Albanian Daily News:

- We have had the honor to read memories of two Swiss Ambassadors covering the period from 1992 to 2002. Your Excellency we are in September 2017, some 25 years after the establishment of your permanent presence in Albania. It is your turn to share kindly with ADN's readers a comprehensive balance sheet of the bilateral relations between Switzerland and Albania?

- Since 1992 relations between our countries have seen an upward trend. They have improved and intensified steadily regarding the fields of diplomacy, cooperation and to a certain extent, also economy. The frequency of high level visits has increased.

For instance, Prime Minister Rama was in Switzerland in March where he met President Doris Leuthard; last November the Head of Swiss Parliament Christa Markwalder was in Albania. Swiss development cooperation support has also increased - Switzerland is currently among the four main donors for Albania's development. In economy and business exchanges are still at a modest level. Currently around 30 Swiss companies have operations in Albania. I would mention the Trans Adriatic Pipeline- TAP - as an important investment that is partly Swiss.

- In your view, which are some of the fields that cooperation can be greater?

- Trade and business exchanges between our two countries have more potential. We look into ways to increase them. This week the new Swiss - Albanian Chamber of Commerce will be launched. Hopefully it will contribute

to increase business and trade. I would like to see more Swiss investors and businesses extend operations in Albania but this obviously depends also on the improvement of the business climate.

- How do you evaluate the progress of Albania in its drive to further democratization and which are its possibilities to further the EU accession talks?

- From the Swiss perspective, I see gradual advancement. I am impressed with the reform dynamics the country is going through. Having said that, Switzerland is not just a passive observer of democracy in Albania - we support local governance and decentralization processes. We both observe and participate in Albania's efforts to further its democracy. The EU integration is certainly a driver for reforms, it provides good incentive, but reforms should primarily be done for the people.

- Mr. Ambassador you are representative of the Swiss government and the Swiss people. Can you be frank: How do Swiss people evaluate Albanians?

- There is no single evaluation that is common to all Swiss people. As government representative, I see Albania as an important country for our foreign policy in the Balkans. I appreciate its constructive role to promote regional integration. Since I have been here I am impressed by the hospitality and the openness of the Albanian people. Within Switzerland it is a different story: perceptions there are shaped mainly by Albanian-speaking immigrants coming from Kosovo or Macedonia.

- In conclusion Mr. Graf what is your message to the Albanian people, but also to its political class?

- Keep the dynamic and pace of the reforms. I encourage the people of Albania to be more proactive and to stand up for public causes. Albania can only progress if each individual takes up responsibility to voice their concerns and to contribute constructively to solving the issues this society faces. More consensus, inclusiveness and dialogue is needed to strengthen social cohesion and democratic progress.

SWISS- ALBANIAN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS; BEGINNINGS OF SWISS EMBASSY IN TIRANA

STITCH DATA:

March 1, 1922 - Recognition of Albania by Switzerland as a sovereign state. Albania declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire in November 1912.

July 1, 1970 - Establishment of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Albania.

October 02, 1970 - First Swiss Ambassador, headquartered in Belgrade, handed over the credentials to Albania's state president.

August 1992 - Opening of the Swiss representation in Tirana. According to Christian Schmed, there were no official opening ceremonies.

September 1992 - Embassy is temporarily stationed at Hotel Dajti. Mr. Christian Hauswirth as a charge d'affaires is the first Swiss diplomat in Albania.

November 1992 - November 1995: Christian Hauswirth became the permanent Swiss charge d'affaires to Albania.

November 1995 - May 2000: Ambassador Thomas Feller

May 2000 - September 2002: Ambassador Francis Cousin

October 2002 - September 2007: Ambassador Erich H. Pircher

October 2007 - October 2012: Ambassador Yvana Enzler

December 2012 - April 2014: Ambassador Alexander Wittwer

September 2014 - to date: Ambassador Christoph Graf

November 1993 - November 2010: Embassy is stationed at a two-storey building in Elbasani Street, 81

December 2010 - Opening of the new Embassy building, owned by the Federation, at Ibrahim Rugova Street

July 2013 - Inauguration of the Embassy

HIGHLIGHTS OF POLITICAL ACTIVITIES:

At the end of 1994, State Secretary Franz Blankart visits Albania. Inauguration of various service projects among others the Maternity in Durres.

March 1996 - The Federal Council and EDA Chairman Flavio Cotti visits Tirana, and topics of discussion were the situation in the Balkans and Kosovo, OSCE role in the Balkans, developments in Albania and bilateral relations between Switzerland and Albania.

March 1997 - Action to evacuate the Swiss community because of the unrest caused by the collapse of the pyramid schemes in Albania.

May 1999 - Visit of Federal Councilor and EDA Chairman Joseph Deiss. Topics of discussion were the situation in Albania as a result of the Kosovo developments, a visit to the refugee camp as well as projects of Swiss Humanitarian Aid and Development Cooperation.

October 2001 - Visit by Federal Councilor Samuel Schmid and Head of the Department for Defense, Population Protection and Sport. The topics of discussion were delivery of trucks and small vehicles from the liquidation resources of the army, a project for the environmentally friendly disposal of toxic substances, demining programs in the north of Albania, training programs in the areas of information and communication as well as the support of the administration office training.

September 2005 - Visit of the Federal Councilor and Head of the Christian Democratic Party, Christoph Blocher to Albania. Bilateral co-operation agreement was signed.

December 2009 - Signing of the free-trade agreements between EFTA States and Albania. Entry into force in November 2010.

April 2013 - Visit of the President of the Parliament, Maya Graf to Albania.

April 2014. Visit of Federal President and EDA Chairman Didier Burkhalter as part of Swiss OSCE Chairmanship.

November 2016, visit by the President of the Parliament, Christa Markwalder to Albania.