

SWISS WITH US



NEWS & VIEWS



From the Embassy of Switzerland in the U.S.

December 2024

From the Ambassador's desk

Dear Friends of Switzerland,

It is that time of the year: the days are short, the nights are cold, and we are reminiscing about the year coming to an end. 2024 was a year full of opportunities and challenges in the diplomatic sphere—I can assure you that the life of an ambassador is never a dull one.

I would like to take the opportunity in this newsletter to highlight some of the major achievements my colleagues and I at the Embassy of Switzerland celebrated in 2024. We were able to show our friends in the United States all that Switzerland has to offer and are looking forward to continuing our successful path in the new year under a new U.S. administration.



Dr. Ralf Heckner is the Ambassador of Switzerland to the United States of America.



Last April, Switzerland made a significant leap into space exploration by joining the Artemis Accords at NASA Headquarters in Washington, DC, thus becoming the 37th country to join the Accords.

The Accords establish that nations do not acquire property rights to the materials they extract on the moon and that the signatories will cooperate on the safe and sustainable exploration of space. This historic moment underscores Switzerland's dedication to responsible lunar exploration and collaboration with international partners.

Led by Swiss Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin and attended by notable figures in the field of space exploration, including Swiss astronaut Marco Sieber and Professor Peter Wurz from the University of Bern, the ceremony highlighted Switzerland's contributions to space science and technology.

This partnership opens doors for exciting collaborations. One example is the University of Bern's DIMPLE instrument, a cutting-edge technology which promises to unveil mysteries of the moon's composition and age, and which was selected by NASA for the Artemis missions.



Swiss Federal Councillor Guy Parmelin (center) signing the Artemis Accords.

[Take a look at highlights from the event here](#)



From May 27 to 31, my colleagues in the political section were pleased to lead a study tour of Switzerland with a delegation of senior staff from the U.S. Congress. The group was comprised of nearly a dozen staffers, from both parties and chambers and representing various leadership offices and legislative committees. The tour brought together a group of committed professionals who are driving important debates on Capitol Hill.

The study tour visited Zurich, Bern, and Geneva, and beyond the overarching theme of Swiss-U.S. bilateral relations, there were many other topics of discussion. Meetings were held with relevant offices in the Swiss government and parliament, along with a number of external institutions. These study tours are part of a long-standing and successful relationship between the Embassy and Capitol Hill, and the 2024 trip was the 25th such event organized by the Embassy for Congressional staff.



The delegation of senior staffers from the U.S. Congress in Switzerland.

[Read more about the visit here](#)



This year marked the 75th anniversary of the four 1949 Geneva Conventions, which have been ratified by every country in the world. Despite their universality, this anniversary is taking place at a time of heightened geopolitical tension and polarization, as well as shifts in the post-World War II multilateral landscape (with over 100 armed conflicts in the world today). These developments have created new and extraordinary challenges that cannot be avoided.

To stress the continued relevance and importance of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and of international humanitarian law, this past May the Embassy hosted an event in partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The discussion concluded with a Q&A and remarks by Mr. Patrick Hamilton, Head of the Regional Delegation for the United States and Canada of the ICRC. The panelists agreed that the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions is a milestone for states and parties to conflict to renew their commitment to these rules which they adopted by consensus and for them to lead by example.



Jacques Pitteloud, former Ambassador of Switzerland to the U.S. (left), Simon Kürsener, Head of Legal Affairs at the Swiss Embassy (right), and the notable guests and panelists who attended the event.

[Find more information about this important event](#)



In Mid-November, two members of Armasuisse's Washington office traveled to California to participate in a multinational technical meeting focused on Unmanned Aerial Systems (UASs). The proliferation of weaponized UASs has exploded following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the pace of technological improvements and adaptations in this field is accelerating. This poses a major challenge to peaceful nations in terms of how to adapt and equip their armies with the best capabilities in a quickly changing environment.

This relatively new domain also requires nations to field systems capable of defeating this threat on cost parity, as the current very expensive anti-air technology is not adapted to counter this threat, and thus favors the attacker. Early this December, the Armasuisse Washington office took part in a conference centered on this subject. Different branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, research laboratories, as well as representatives of multinational militaries and companies presented their views, their results, and their latest defense systems, built upon various technologies.



In early December, a delegation from the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) visited Washington, D.C., to engage with policymakers, Congressional staffers, think-tankers, and private-sector representatives. The visit focused on understanding the economic and trade policy priorities of the incoming second Trump administration.

Hervé Lohr, Deputy Head of Bilateral Economic Relations, and his deputy, Johannes Rühl, led the delegation, holding discussions with key figures such as Mayur Patel, Chief Trade Counsel at the Senate Finance Committee, and Matt Siordia, Deputy Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for the UK and Europe. The Swiss delegation emphasized Switzerland's longstanding trade relationship with the United States and highlighted its role as a major foreign direct investor with a significant footprint in U.S. manufacturing. For some of the meetings, the delegation was joined by Rahul Sahgal, CEO of the Swiss-American Chamber of Commerce, reflecting the close collaboration between the Swiss government and the private sector.

As part of the visit, Ambassador Ralf Heckner hosted a panel discussion on "Resilient International Medical Supply Chains." Moderated by Clete Willems, the panel featured Julia Nielson, Dr. Chad Bown, and Leo A. Farber, who debated policies for securing fragile supply chains and explored avenues for enhanced international cooperation among like-minded nations.

Switzerland remains committed to promoting innovation and advancing workforce development, continuing to strengthen its mutually beneficial economic partnership with the United States.



From left to right: Clete Willems, Dr. Chad Bown, Julia Nielson, and Leo A. Farber.



The Swiss Armed Forces regularly send service members to the United States to pursue professional military education, either with one of the service branches of the U.S. Armed Forces or at institutions of higher education of the U.S. Department of Defense.

Colonel (then Lieutenant-Colonel) Reto Wassmer, a Swiss Armed Forces career officer, completed a Master's program at the National Defense University in 2024. His most recent assignment had been as Chief of Staff of the CBRN-EOD

[Click here](#) to find out more about Col. Wassmer's personal experiences during his time in Washington, DC, and this U.S.-Swiss cooperation opportunity.



In 2024, our Public Diplomacy Team celebrated Switzerland's diverse values, culture, and interests, reaching a broad range of audiences in the United States.

The Swiss Film Club presented eight films, both online and in-person, and hosted discussions with four directors, exploring themes such as gender equality and racial identity. Art enthusiasts enjoyed our programs on Swiss artists [Alberto Giacometti](#) and [Ugo Rondinone](#), organized with the Hirshhorn Museum and the Phillips Collection, respectively. On the literature front, we hosted a discussion and film screening focused, in part, on the renowned Swiss author [Max Frisch](#).

Our language promotion covered all Swiss national languages, including marking the *Mois de la Francophonie* and the *Settimana della lingua italiana*. We also reached hundreds of foreign language educators at the annual ACTFL Convention. We engaged students of all ages through the Embassy Adoption Program with DC Public Schools, and multiple student briefings throughout the year.

In this Olympic year, sports diplomacy—from Switzerland's [cycling culture](#) and [running shoe](#) technology, to a holiday [skating celebration](#)—took center stage.

The Embassy also engaged political leaders and policy makers, initiating a [Women Mayors Delegation](#), in which nine U.S. mayors travelled to Switzerland for exchanges on the future of cities. We also collaborated with the International Committee of the Red Cross to present the exhibition Digital Dilemmas, addressing digital risks during conflicts.

We look forward to continuing our diverse range of programs and connecting with many more of you next year!



SWISS IMPACT notable visitors for 2024

Throughout the year, our Embassy was dedicated to hosting distinguished guests, including one of our federal councilors, [Guy Parmelin](#), who visited DC to sign and renew the [Memorandum of Understanding on vocational education and training](#), expanding and strengthening apprenticeships in Switzerland and the U.S.

[Ambassador Benedikt Wechsler](#), Head of the Digitalisation Division (DIGI), traveled to Pittsburgh, PA, on invitation from the Carnegie Mellon Institute for Strategy & Technology. He spoke at a panel discussion on the topic of “Digital Diplomacy: Building Solidarity in Cyberspace” and visited globally leading tech organizations to discuss common interests and identify opportunities for increased collaboration between the two countries.

Our guests also included the presidents of both houses of the Swiss parliament, [Eric Nussbaumer](#), President of the National Council, and [Eva Herzog](#), President of the Council of States, who visited Washington, DC, in March. In May, we had the honor of welcoming a parliamentary delegation of the [Swiss National Council's Foreign Affairs Committee](#) (FAC). The members of parliament were briefed on the bilateral relations between Switzerland and the United States before visiting the headquarters of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

The list of our distinguished guests also includes F-35 Program Executive Officer [Lieutenant General Michael J. Schmidt](#), Librarian of Congress [Carla Hayden](#), Swiss film director [Susanna Fanzun](#), representatives from the U.S. Department of State, and ambassadors from numerous African countries including the [Honorable Molly Phee](#), U.S. Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Anna Nelson, U.S. Deputy Special Envoy for Global Food Security, and [her Excellency Ambassador Hilda Suka-Mafudze](#), permanent representative of the African Union (AU) to the United States.



INFO BOX

U.S. Think Tankers visit Switzerland's Innovation Clusters

Did you know that Switzerland, with its export-oriented economy, is the 6th largest foreign direct investor in the United States? And that the U.S. has become Switzerland's number one scientific partner in terms of co-published research papers?

Both countries also share the strategic vision to diversify economic growth, build a highly-skilled workforce, and foster technology-driven developments.

To share perspectives on these priorities, in September we had the pleasure to organize a week-long delegation visit to Switzerland for a group of selected U.S. think tank representatives. The study tour offered the delegation a unique opportunity to also experience how regional ecosystems actively work to boost their own local expertise and how they drive Swiss innovation as a whole.

More information on the week-long study tour can be found [here](#)!

Invitation to subscribe to the SwissCommunity Newsletter (Organization of the Swiss Abroad - OSA)

If you are a Swiss citizen abroad and you want to receive more useful information and insights, subscribe to the SwissCommunity newsletter! It is sent out around 10 times a year and covers topics of direct interest to Swiss citizens abroad.

Here are some examples of the topics covered:

Important news for the Swiss abroad: information on AHV, health insurance, military service, e-voting and [webinars](#).

Tips and tricks for life abroad: practical recommendations [to simplify everyday life](#) for Swiss living abroad or to facilitate a return to Switzerland.

Insights into Swiss communities abroad: a look at the activities of their [online community platform](#) and initiatives such as the ["Living in"](#) project.

Young Swiss Abroad: Information on [camps and activities](#) that keep young people connected to Switzerland.

National Apprenticeship Week 2024

The 10th Annual National Apprenticeship Week (NAW) in the United States took place from November 17 to 23, 2024.

Are you curious about the development of Swiss-style apprenticeship in the United States? Have a look at our new interactive map: [Swiss companies offering apprenticeship programs in the U.S](#)



Diplomacy and Switzerland’s impact in the United States are dear to my heart, but for the next few weeks I will focus on what matters the most: spending time with my family and loved ones and celebrating our lives and the things we are grateful for. I wish you all a happy and peaceful holiday season and I look forward to writing to you again in the new year.

Sincerely,

Ralf Heckner



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