

## Micheline Calmy-Rey in China

*Below the reader finds a summary regarding the visit to China of Mrs Federal Councillor Micheline CALMY-REY. October 27th to 29th, 2006, Beijing and Guangzhou.*

*The primary goal of Mrs CALMY-REY's trip to China was to follow-up on the regular contacts with her counterpart, Mr LI Zhaoxing, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the PRC whom she has met in February 2006 in Switzerland. Following the intensification of the bilateral contacts, these high level talks are intended to become more frequent. The second reason for Mrs Federal Councillor's visit was the official inauguration of the Swiss Consulate General in Guangzhou.*

### Official visit with signing of MoU

The Swiss official delegation was composed of Mr Dante MARTINELLI, Swiss Ambassador in China, Mr Martin DAHINDEN, Head of the Direction of Resources and Exterior Network of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Mr Roberto BALZARETTI, Ambassador and Diplomatic Councillor, Mr Pierre COMBERNOUS, Ambassador and Head of the Political Division Asia / Oceania at the DFA, Mr Massimo BAGGI, Head Asia / Oceania Division of SECO, Mr Lars KNUCHEL, Substitute Head of Information and Spokesman at the DFA, and Mr T rence BILLETER, Diplomatic Collaborator in charge of the China Desk at the DFA.

On Friday October 27 in Beijing, the ministers' meeting allowed to cover several themes:

- bilateral political relations, with the perspective to sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) which will deal with all the aspects of common interests;
- economic questions, with an emphasis on intellectual property;
- immigration problems;



*The two official delegations in Beijing at the beginning of the meeting.*

- human rights, which have been discussed in a general way as well as in the relevant aspects linked to the bilateral dialogue launched in 1991; the incident that occurred in October 2006 at the border between Tibet and Nepal, causing at least one death, has made the object of a demand of clarification; two reports on individual cases have been transmitted equivalently;
- principles of development and the cooperation in multilateral aspect;
- the situation in North Korea.

In the early afternoon, Mr ZHOU Ji, Minister of Education, and Mrs CALMY-REY signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on higher education cooperation in the Residence of the Swiss Ambassador. This text should serve as a basis for further developments in fields of common interests such as: scholarships, collaboration in research and science, language and civilization, exchanges of delegations, professional teaching.

Two meetings of courtesy followed in the palace of the National People's Congress. In the first meeting, with Mr WU Bangguo, president of the NPC, discussions were held on the bilateral political and economic relations, with a focus on intellectual property. The tone was rather firm when talking about human rights. The second meeting was with Mr LI Changchun, member of the Permanent Committee of the Politburo, who took the opportunity to talk about his visit to Switzerland in June 2006.

Back to the Residence, Mrs Federal Councillor talked with the Swiss community in Beijing before giving a press conference in front of representatives of Chinese and Swiss media.

The next day, the Swiss delegation met Mr ZHENG Bijian, director of the China Reform Forum (Zhongguo Gaige Kaifang Luntan), for a working breakfast. " minence grise" and close advisor of President HU Jintao at the time the latter was at the Head of the Party School, Mr ZHENG is the facilitator of this think tank. The political reforms in China were covered with a perspective of regime democratization, extension of human rights and evolution of law. The situation in North Korea received equal attention.

During a lunch with a group of Swiss businessmen active in China, they, as demanded by the Head of DFA, talked about the services offered to Swiss enterprises by the Embassy and the Swiss Confederation in China. If a general satisfaction was perceptible concerning the quality and the usefulness of the services, their reinforcements were hoped.

Having also talked on the political and economic situation, the businessmen mentioned a couple of problems encountered while leading their business, some being persistent, like the implementation of laws at all the administrative levels, including the local one. The homologation of drugs and the question of equal treatment between foreign and Chinese companies, (i.e. access to the public markets) were also raised.



*Meeting Mrs CALMY-REY with Mr WU Bangguo, President of the People's National Assembly.*

The CEOs further mentioned that the well-known proverb in China “to count on one’s own strength” remained true for this country.

Finally, the acceleration in the delivery procedure of Swiss visas was stressed. On the other hand, Schengen visas continue to constrain business trips because two distinct administrative procedures have to be conducted, which makes the total process complicated and time consuming.

The afternoon was spent in a relaxed atmosphere, as it consisted in a visit to the Forbidden City and to the Jingshan Park. Moreover, it was the first time, according to some, that the Minister of Foreign affairs himself, Mr LI Zhaoxing, guided the visit. Accompanied by officials of his Ministry, Mr LI showed his counterpart that he strongly appreciated the excursion organized in the Swiss alps during his last trip.

### **Opening celebration in Guangzhou**

The next day, the delegation started its programme with a meeting with Mr ZHANG Dejiang, Secretary of the Communist Party for the Guangdong province and Member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CCP. One of the goals of Mrs CALMY-REY’s visit to Guangzhou being the inauguration of the new Consulate General of Switzerland in this city, the Secretary of the Communist Party and the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed their satisfaction with this supplementary proof of the intensification of the relations between the two countries. In the next meeting, Mr SHEN Bonian, first Vice-Mayor of the city of Guangzhou, fully agreed on this point. Likewise, Mrs CALMY-REY expressed her

keenest thanks to the provincial and municipal authority for their excellent support, as the Swiss representation was inaugurated less than one year after its first establishment in Guangzhou.

Let us remind that the province of Guangdong constitutes the third development pole in China with Beijing



*Mrs CALMY-REY with Mr LI Zhaoxing, Minister of Foreign Affairs in Beijing.*



Guangzhou, October 29th, 2006 – Opening of the “Swiss Design Now” exhibition.

and Shanghai: one ninth of the GNP, 20% of direct investments, one third of foreign trade, 14% of national savings, and one third of the tourists that visit Switzerland.

In the beginning of the afternoon of Sunday November 29, the Head of DFA unveiled the plaque of the new Consulate General, the Swiss fourth diplomatic representation on Chinese land after Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. Mr Consul General Werner E. NIEV-ERGELT presented the new buildings, the staff and the



MoU signature with Mr ZHOU Ji, Minister of Education on October 27th in Beijing.

equipment, ready to be fully operational at the end of 2006. He showed a publication carried out for the inauguration: Switzerland – Commemorative Volume for the Opening of the Consulate General in Guangzhou. With forewords of Mrs Federal Councillor, of Mr HUANG Huahua, Governor of Guangdong and Mr Dante MARTINELLI, Ambassador of Switzerland in China, this work gathers varied texts.

In order to highlight the reinforcement of the Swiss presence in the south of the country, the exhibition “Swiss Design Now”, set up previously in Shanghai and Beijing, was presented in Guangzhou by l’École cantonale d’art de Lausanne (ECAL, University of Art and Design) in collaboration with the art museum of Guangzhou. Mrs Federal Councillor and Mr Pierre KELLER, director of ECAL, addressed to the audience to underline the originality of the collected design works, before cutting the inaugural ribbon with other important invited guests. Special prizes were also distributed to diverse designers by Mr Dante MARTINELLI.

Finally, after the press conference which topic was the official opening of the Consulate General, Mrs CALMY-REY addressed the Swiss community and the Chinese guests at the beginning of the evening. With a loud music and fireworks in the background, she could, accompanied by Mr LI Ronggen, Vice-Governor of Guangdong, “add touches that bring a work of art to life”, by painting pupils on a lion face, which immediately started a traditional dance as a sign for good fortune.

After these three days, one can retain a dense visit, important contacts with the leaders of a country which becomes more and more our neighbour, negotiations in various fields as well as a follow-up of sometimes delicate questions. In short, the normal relations between demanding partners. But what is normal is not, in fact, insignificant.

### **A Sunday without polemic would not be a real Sunday**

Shortly before the end of the mission, one Swiss Sunday newspaper tried to launch a controversy about the Federal Councillor's visit to China. According to the article, the latter was fully wrong; her trip was a failure because she could not sign a Memorandum of Understanding covering the whole of the bilateral relations, subject of her visit.

## **Guangzhou Opening of the Consulate General of Switzerland**

The Consulate General of Switzerland in Guangzhou is operational since 1.11.2006, developing its activities over the Provinces of Guangdong, Fujian, Hainan and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. It is the fourth pillar of the Swiss consular and diplomatic network in China, which stretches, under the Embassy in Beijing, to the Consulates General in Shanghai and Hong Kong.

The activities of the Consulate General cover the following areas:

- To promote and safeguard Swiss interests in the following fields: economy, trade, finance, science, research, environment, education, medias, culture and tourism.
- To inform and assist Swiss companies and nationals to resolve problems; to organize or co-organize events to present Switzerland; to observe, analyse and report about the above mentioned fields in the consular district.
- To liaise and manage the network with the local authorities, institutions, organizations, companies and persons.

To provide passports, visa, legalisation of documents, etc.

Arrived in October 2005 in Guangzhou, Mr Nievergelt built up this Consulate General. Before this assignment, during 2002–2005, he was the head of the Consular Affairs Division at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in Berne. In 2001 Mr Nievergelt reopened the diplomatic mission in Baghdad. 1997–2001 he was the Consul of Switzerland in Venice (Italy). During seven years, from 1991–1997, Mr Nievergelt was inspector of the FDFA. 1970–1990 he had posted in Berlin, Lyon, Tehran, Prague, Nairobi, Frankfurt, Milan and Amman.

Mr Werner Nievergelt is married to Esther Brinkmann Nievergelt, who is a jewellery designer.

The reasons of this visit had, however, nothing to do with the signature of this document (see above). It is therefore particularly regrettable to note that, for reasons which are more linked to interior politics than to the Swiss foreign policy, some did not hesitate to “shoot in the back” of a representative of the government, at the moment where this Minister was on an official visit in the country with which she was, precisely, leading negotiations. Such an attitude causes damage to the position and the image of Switzerland. One wanted to give a snub to the Head of DFA and to her interlocutors. Then why should these interlocutors discuss with a person repudiated by the “back office”? A few hours of waiting would have been enough before raising questions and launching the debate. But it is true that Sundays are sometimes long in Switzerland...

*by Gérald Bérout*

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*Official opening of the Consulate General Office in Guangzhou, Mrs CALMY-REY and Mr Werner NIEVERGELT, Consul General.*

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