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Federal Department of Home Affairs FDHA

Sport, education and research on the agenda of Pascal Couchepin's Asian trip

Bern, 01.08.2008 - Vietnam and the Philippines, two countries whose economies have posted strong growth in recent years, will for the first time be receiving the visit of a President of the Swiss Confederation. En route for Beijing where, on Friday, 8 August, he will be attending the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games, Federal Councillor Pascal Couchepin will make a three-day official visit to Vietnam. While in China, he will take the opportunity, on 7 August in Shanghai, to inaugurate SwissNex, a centre of excellence whose remit is to strengthen relations between Switzerland and China in the fields of education, research, innovation and culture. On his return home, the Head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs will hold official talks with the Philippine authorities.

In Vietnam, the President of the Swiss Confederation will meet his opposite number, Nguyen Minh Triet, and will have talks with the Secretary-General of the Communist Party, Nong Duc Manh, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and the Chairman of the National Assembly, Nguyen Phu Trong. During his visit, the Head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs will also meet Nguyen Thien Nhan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education and Training. Cooperation agreements between Vietnamese universities and the University of Geneva and the Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne EPFL will be signed during the Swiss visit.

Mr Couchepin's visit to China will begin with the official inauguration of the SwissNex building in Shanghai. This centre of excellence, the fourth after Boston, San Francisco and Singapore, will be instrumental in strengthening Chinese-Swiss cooperation between China and Switzerland in the areas of education, research, technology, innovation and culture. It is a new step in the bilateral relations between the two countries which will be celebrating the 60th anniversary in 2010 of the establishment of diplomatic links. Switzerland was one of the first countries in the world to recognise the People's Republic of China.

On 8 August, at the invitation of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) whose headquarters are in Lausanne, the President of the Swiss Confederation will attend the opening of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. During his stay in the Chinese capital, Pascal Couchepin will attend the official reception given by the Chinese President, Hu Jintao. He will also be meeting members of the Swiss Olympic delegation and attending the Francophonie official reception. On Friday, 9 August, he will host a reception at the House of Switzerland in which the President of the IOC, Jacques Rogge, will be taking part.

Prior to his return to Switzerland, the President of the Swiss Confederation will spend two days on 11 and 12 August in the Philippines which, like Vietnam, is a member of the group of countries called the "Next Eleven". This is the name given to eleven emerging countries identified as having a high potential for the economic development and growth recently generated by countries like Brazil, Russia, India and China. In Manila, Pascal Couchepin will meet President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Talks with political figures and representatives from the world of business are also on the agenda of this two-day visit to the Philippines. The President of the Swiss Confederation will also be visiting the Asian Development Bank and the International Rice Research Institute supported by Switzerland.

Address for enquiries:

Jean-Marc Crevoisier, Head of Communication to the FDHA, tel. + 41 79 763 84 10

Editor:

General Secretariat FDHA