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President Doris Leuthard to head economic mission to China

Bern, 05.08.2010 - President Doris Leuthard will pay an official visit to China from 10 to 14 August 2010, accompanied by a high-ranking business delegation. The main aims of the mission are to hold official talks with Chinese President Hu Jintao and a meeting with the Chairman of China's National People's Congress, Wu Bangguo. Further meetings at government level are planned in order to strengthen and consolidate relations between the two countries and improve access to the Chinese market for Swiss products and investments. Talks will focus on the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations and the joint feasibility study with a view to a free trade agreement between Switzerland and China.

In Chongqing, the first port of call, President Doris Leuthard will hold official talks with the Mayor Huang Qifan and party secretary Bo Xilai. She will also use the opportunity to take stock of the local economic situation in the context of the "Go West" strategy of the Chinese government, which is designed to encourage foreign businesses to participate in opening up and developing Western China.

The second stop on her visit will be Shanghai, where she primarily plans to cultivate contacts with the Chinese authorities and meet representatives of Swiss business in the city. President Leuthard will also visit the Swiss Pavilion at Expo 2010 Shanghai on 12 August, Switzerland's National Pavilion Day, and attend the official ceremony in Switzerland's honour.

The last stage of the trip takes President Leuthard to Beijing, where she will be received by the Chinese Head of State and Party Secretary, President Hu Jintao, for an official working visit. She will also meet Wu Bangguo, the Chairman of China's National People's Congress. The schedule also includes meetings with representatives of the Chinese government and festivities to mark the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and China.

In economic terms, China (including Hong Kong) has since 2002 been Switzerland's most important trading partner in Asia. It is worth noting that Switzerland is one of the few western countries to have achieved a trade surplus in dealings with China since 2003. In 2009, the bilateral trade volume amounted to around CHF 10.6 billion. Economic exchanges saw Swiss exports reach CHF 5.5 billion, while imports from China amounted to CHF 5.1 billion. The level of Swiss investments in China had reached around CHF 6.8 billion by the end of 2008. Trade relations with China are continuing to develop at a faster pace than overall Swiss export trade.

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