

Switzerland national day

From economic to scientific ties, bilateral relationship flourishes

Urs Bucher
AMBASSADOR OF SWITZERLAND

Looking at our bilateral relations, some similarities between our two countries become quite clear. Good organization, cooperation and will power to succeed are decisive in efforts of both countries. When I look at Japanese reconstruction in the Tohoku region, I have, therefore, a deep conviction that the rebuilding of the devastated regions will go smoothly and will take Japan and the Japanese society one step further. If Switzerland can help in rebuilding, we shall do so and we wish my host country and its population all the best in these efforts.

But we have other things in common as well. Japanese citizens easily associate Switzerland with watches and chocolate, not least also with that little shepherd girl called Heidi. On

the other hand, when Swiss people hear about Japan, they think of Mount Fuji, sumo and sushi. Both impressions remain thus a bit on the surface. The distance between our two countries is substantial and the differences in lifestyles are very evident enough. In spite of this — or probably because of this — the mutual interest has always been very keen and the relations between our two nations go back to the middle of the 19th century.

There is a historical reason that Swiss watches are well-known in Japan. It was the watch industry that urged the Swiss government to send the first official delegation to Japan, arriving here at the end of the Edo Period, which helped to make Swiss products known. Our economy has been the first ambassador of our country to Japan. Economic interests have kept up the contact and have expanded relations very rapidly. Details of these economic and scientific achievements and the often close cooperation with Ja-

pan are less known however. Who would know that Swiss heavy industry had a strong foothold in the ship diesel engine market and that licensing these engine designs to Japan was an essential factor for the Japanese shipbuilding industry to take off after World War II?

And probably unknown to many persons here in Japan is the fact that our landlocked country sent a research submarine on Jan. 23, 1960, to the deepest ocean fault line on the Japanese Pacific coast in an exploit that has remained unchanged today. The depth of

10,910 meters in the Mariana Trench has never been attained since by any submersible steered by humans inside the vessel. It may, therefore, be less of a surprise that the grandson of the designer and researcher of the boat Trieste, as it was called, is Bertrand Piccard. He

writes history of his own with the first solar-propelled aircraft that has just finished the first long flights out of Switzerland to Brussels, Paris and back to Switzerland.

Some Swiss people start to know more about your beautiful country, some have seen for instance the recent news about the biggest super-computer now based in Japan. Regular scientific exchanges have completed the mission that started on pure economic grounds. We feel, therefore, that together with Japan, we are today at the forefront of human creativity and scientific development, energetically pushing our countries to new frontiers. These results are only possible by uniting forces and by strong cooperation. Only by standing together in a common effort these frontiers of human endeavor can be developed further. Speaking about the achieved results in the two countries does not hurt either, as there is still a lot to be discovered in the other country by both sides.

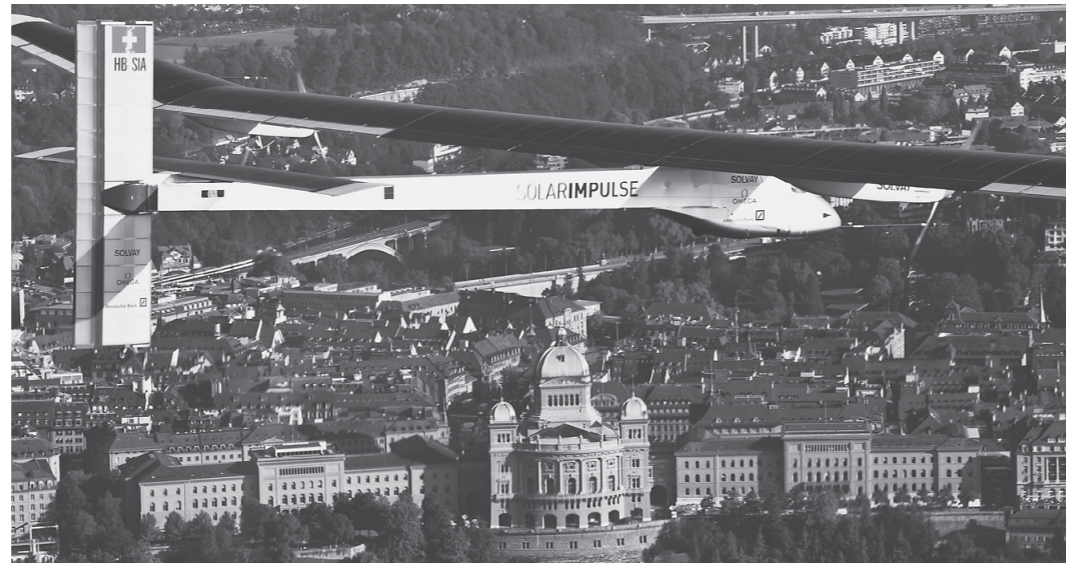
Congratulations and
best wishes on
Switzerland National Day

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Making history: A Swiss solar-propelled aircraft flies over Zurich. SOLAR IMPULSE / REVILLARD