

Swiss president's visit

Exchanges convey connection

Urs Bucher
AMBASSADOR OF SWITZERLAND



The 2014 celebrations for the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations will mark a new chapter in the history of our friendship with Japan. With the signing of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce on February 6, 1864, close bonds were estab-

lished between our two countries and since then, they have been steadily developing in the fields of economics, international relations, science & technology and culture.

Economic relations have always been an important pillar of exchange. What started with the trade of watches, machinery and textiles paved the way to extensive and fruitful exchanges in a variety of goods that lead to Switzerland becoming the first European country to sign a Free Trade and Economic Partnership



Agreement with Japan in 2009. Today, Japan is Switzerland's fourth most important trading partner and it remains our most important research partner in Asia, as highlighted by the extensive cooperation in the fields of education, research and innovation.

Japanese people's love for the natural beauty of Switzerland's mountains and lakes always brings a smile to my face. What might be more surprising to them is my country's role as a hub of diplomacy and a platform for international business. For instance, only last month, the Syria Peace Talks were held in Geneva as was the World Economic Forum in Davos. Switzerland also ranks number one in the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report 2013-2014 and in the WIPO Global Innovation Index 2013.

This anniversary year is an auspicious opportunity to underscore the extent and strength of our relationship, and it will be marked in both countries with a series of outstanding events and a number of high-level political visits. In Japan, Swissdays, a multifaceted four-day event to be held in Roppongi Hills will officially launch the celebrations in the presence of H.E. Didier



President Didier Burkhalter of the Swiss Confederation

Burkhalter, president of the Swiss Confederation. Later throughout 2014 we will present an exciting line-up of diverse cultural events. Music fans will be treated to the Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, the Zurich Chamber Orchestra and the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande as well as the Montreux Jazz Festival in Kawasaki. Exhibitions of Felix Vallotton, Balthus, Ferdinand Hodler and the collection of the Kunsthau Zurich should satisfy those interested in visual arts. Finally, the Béjart Ballet Lausanne will return to Japan to the delight of performing arts enthusiasts.

I am very much looking forward to celebrating this significant year with the people of Japan.

For more information of the anniversary events, visit swissjapan150.jp and facebook.com.SwissEmbassy/Tokyo

Long-serving, public servant dedicated to people

Didier Burkhalter, born on Apr. 17, 1960, grew up in the village of Auvornier on the shores of Lake Neuchâtel. He obtained a degree in economics from the University of Neuchâtel. Before his move into politics, he held a number of posts in the academic world and the private sector. In 1985 Burkhalter joined the Radical Democratic Party (now the Liberal Democratic Party, or FDP). He was secretary of the Neuchâtel branch of the party, before becoming the full-time secretary for French-speaking Switzerland within the FDP Switzerland. In 1991 he was elected to the executive (town council) of Neuchâtel, which he chaired for three legislative periods (1994/1995, 1998/1999, 2001/2002). He remained a member of the council until 2005.

During his political career, Burkhalter has served as a member of parliament at all three levels of the Swiss political system: communal (parliament of Hauterive, Neuchâtel), cantonal (Neuchâtel parliament) and federal (National Council and Council of States).

In 2003 Mr. Burkhalter was elected to the National Council, and to the Council of States in

2007. During this time he has served on a number of parliamentary committees and was also a member of the Swiss delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Burkhalter was elected to the Federal Council on 16 September 2009 and appointed as the head of the Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA), a post he held until 31 December 2011. Burkhalter has been head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs since Jan. 1, 2012.

On Dec. 4, the Federal Assembly elected Didier Burkhalter as President of the Swiss Confederation for 2014.

Burkhalter is married and the father of three children.

Major agenda in Japan

President Burkhalter, with his wife, is paying a working visit to Japan from Feb. 3 to 6.

During his stay in Japan, the president will make a State Call on Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko at the Imperial Palace. Burkhalter will have a summit meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Abe will also host a dinner for Burkhalter. The presi-

dent will also meet with Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida.

Also, President Burkhalter is scheduled to visit Kamakura and Fujisawa in Kanagawa Prefecture.

This visit by President Burkhal-

ter and his wife, particularly this year, the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Switzerland, is expected to further deepen the friendly relationship between the two countries.



For peace: The Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland is a symbol of the many international organizations that have their headquarters in the city. SWITZERLANDTOURISM

Heartiest Welcome to H.E. Didier Burkhalter,
President of the Swiss Confederation,
on the Occasion of His Visit to Japan
and the 150th Anniversary of
the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations
between Switzerland and Japan



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Swissdays opening in Roppongi

Swissdays festival will be held from Feb. 6 to 9 at Roppongi Hills Arena in Minato Ward, showcasing various food, culture and music from Switzerland.

For more details, visit swissdays.jp/en