

Greetings from the new Ambassador

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **80 (2014)**

Heft [5]

PDF erstellt am: **12.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943958>

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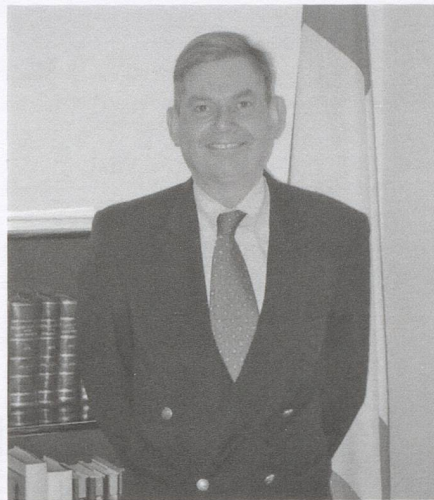
Greetings from the new Ambassador

Dear fellow citizens, dear New Zealander friends of our country, grüezi:

Having arrived in New Zealand at the beginning of September, I will serve as your Ambassador in the years to come. I have taken up my duties, even though an Ambassador is not fully operational before presenting his credentials to the head of State, in the case of New Zealand to the representative of Queen Elizabeth II, the Governor General. Let me begin by telling you that I am thrilled and honored by my appointment as our country's representative to New Zealand and the Polynesian Islands. I have never been down here, but I always wanted to live one day in New Zealand, ever since I was a boy. Be assured that I intend to serve Switzerland and her citizens in this country with all my energy in the years to come. I look forward to discovering New Zealand, her friendly people and her beauty, but most of all our Swiss communities on both islands. A small, but competent team at the Embassy and Consul Deutschle in Auckland will help me in my task. An Embassy is always a team, and I count myself lucky to be able to rely on these committed colleagues.

Let me tell you who I am. I am a native of our largest city, Zürich, but have become with the years much more a country boy than a city dweller. A few days after arriving in Wellington, I have turned sixty. My much younger wife Laura is American-born, from Virginia, and will join me shortly from back home in the Canton of Zurich where we live in an old farmhouse. Laura has been looking forward to moving to an English speaking country and in particular to New Zealand as much as myself. With her will also travel our two dogs, a Great Swiss Mountain Dog, not to be confused with the Bernese or Dürnbächler, and a mix of Entlebucher and Appenzeller. They don't know yet how far they will travel... Even though a historian by training, I have been active in international affairs all my working life, first for the Red Cross and for the United Nations, since 1987 for the Confederation. My last postings have been Consul General in Milan with a Swiss community of over 30'000 people in Northern Italy, and until this July in Ivory Coast as Ambassador to five West African countries.

Wellington is the farthest posting possible for a Swiss diplomat, but to a country that is in many ways close to us. Both New Zealand and Switzerland are committed to real democracy, to the rule of law, to peaceful settlement of international



conflicts and to the protection of nature. Our nations have learned already in the 19th Century to deal with their internal problems without resorting to violence. We are both proud of our heritage, our history and our traditions, all things that set us apart from other countries. Both nations believe in international cooperation while remaining fiercely attached to their independence. New Zealand is made of two islands by nature, while we Swiss, living in the middle of the European continent, have chosen not to join the European Union. There are of course also notable differences. New Zealand has been a loyal partner in the Western Alliance from Gallipoli to Afghanistan while Switzerland remains committed to her neutrality as the best contribution she can offer to peace in the world.

An Ambassador's first task is to maintain relations with the country he is sent to, from the government level down to local councils and non-governmental institutions. Like Swiss envoys before me, I will explore new ways of cooperation between our countries in as many fields as possible. Like all of you, I am very proud of our system of direct democracy where the highest authority and the final say belong not to the parliament and even less to the government, but to the people. I do not consider this system an export good we sell abroad, but if New Zealanders, like citizens of other democratic countries, show an interest in it, I will use every opportunity offered to explain it. I should like to encourage all of you to use the democratic rights that all citizens of our country enjoy, wherever they may live in the world. We vote on important issues about every three months, and in the coming year we will give a new Federal Assembly the mandate to work on our behalf.

Both our countries earn a high share

of their income exporting goods and services. Due to the geography, only a small fraction of these exports are exchanged between the two. Whenever Swiss companies, be they small or huge multinationals, explore new ways to do business with New Zealand, the Embassy will do everything to assist them. We will also be happy to supply basic information to New Zealand exporters.

Seven thousand registered Swiss citizens and certainly many more have made New Zealand their permanent or temporary home. This country is one of the few to where Swiss still regularly emigrate. When back home this summer, I was surprised how many people told me that they have family or friends in New Zealand, sometimes lived here themselves. You, the Swiss New Zealanders, are my highest priority, together with the tasks our government will entrust me with. I have already taken note of the existence of your network of associations and joined myself the Wellington club. We should all be grateful to our fellow citizens who keep these clubs and this magazine attractive through their dedicated work. I look forward to visiting you all and participating with my wife in your activities, be it celebrating our national day or simply sitting around a pot of fondue. My Jass skills probably got a bit rusty since my army days and I am not much of a Kegler yet. But going out to the range with a rifle is a favorite pastime both of Laura and myself. Most of all, I look forward to discovering with you the great outdoors and the mountains of this country as soon as time permits.

The Embassy and its Consular Service are at your service. We will do everything to make things as easy as possible for you. The introduction of biometric passports, a price we unfortunately have to pay for the safety of all us, has not made things simpler. We are working currently on bringing mobile stations back to New Zealand, hopefully in the first half of 2015. Do not hesitate to contact us if you face problems. We strive to be as efficient as any communal administration back home. (I know, there is a difference: the Mayor you can elect yourself, the Ambassador is appointed by the Federal Council...) The Embassy team will always do its utmost to find solutions to your questions. If need be, I will always make myself personally available to you.

Looking forward to meeting you in person, I send you my heartfelt greetings,

David Vogelsanger