

# **EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

## **DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH SWITZERLAND, ICELAND, AND NORWAY**

### **REPORT**

#### **On the 23<sup>rd</sup> EU-Switzerland Interparliamentary Meeting In Strasbourg, 18 November 2004**

Mrs WALLIS, Chair of the EP delegation, opened the 23rd EU- Switzerland Interparliamentary Meeting and welcomed the Swiss delegation to the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

\*  
\* \*

Mr RÜBIG (EP) briefed the Swiss delegation on the present and future enlargement of the EU. He glanced back on the history of the European Union and shared his personal joy at experiencing the historic enlargement. Regarding future enlargement, the extensive reforms made in Romania and Bulgaria were brought up, as well as the aim of these states to become members in 2007. The applicant states Turkey, Croatia and the Former Republic of Macedonia were presented and human rights issues were pointed out as a problematic area. He noted that major debates and discussions in the Parliament on the upcoming negotiations with Turkey are expected and he stressed the importance of keeping close contacts in various forms with these countries as well as with the Eastern Balkans. The briefing ended with the statement that there will probably be a referendum on EU membership in Switzerland within the next 5 years and it was mentioned that Switzerland has negotiated for EU membership twice but withdrew its application.

Mrs ROTH-BEHRENDT (EP) briefed the Swiss delegation on the European parliament after the 2004 elections. She highlighted the collegial work procedures and described the European Parliament as the most interesting parliament in the world. She also highlighted the fact that although this parliament with members from 25 countries includes individuals with various degrees of political experience, all take a collective responsibility for the legislative work.

Mr DAVID, Acting Chair of the Swiss delegation, thanked for the warm welcome of his delegation and stressed the importance of continued good relations between Switzerland and the EU. He thanked Mr RÜBIG for his briefing on the EU's abilities to incorporate different new members and corrected his statement that the Swiss application was withdrawn, when in fact it was frozen. It was stated that Switzerland will follow the development of the EU Constitution and that debates on Switzerland's role in Europe are expected to take place in the Swiss Parliament in December this year. He also stressed the strong tradition of direct democracy in

Switzerland and described the decision making procedure in the EU as taking place on a level too far away from the people, as seen from a Swiss perspective.

A question from Mr KLINZ (EP) followed where he inquired as to when the Swiss membership application could be reinitiated and Mrs ROTH-BEHRENDT asked if there really is a conflict between the Swiss direct democracy and the EU system. Mr DAVID replied that the Swiss people would perceive the loss of a direct say on many small daily matters as problematic.

\*  
\* \*

Mr FEHR (CH) briefed the European Parliament delegation on the state of the Switzerland-EU Bilateral Negotiations II in Switzerland, where a referendum on the Schengen and Dublin Convention is expected to take place after the issue has been brought up in the Swiss parliament in December. Mrs WALLIS expressed her hope that the referendum will be successful and reflected upon the complicated but good working relationship between the EU and Switzerland, and wondered how much further this bilateral relationship can be extended. Mr BRINKMANN, from the Commission, stated that the Commission is satisfied with its relations to Switzerland and that he also hoped the Swiss people would ratify the Schengen and Dublin Convention, as did Mrs DÜHRKOP DÜHRKOP (EP).

\*  
\* \*

In the light of the recent EU-enlargement, the two delegations recalled their Joint Statement of 1998 and reintroduced the wish that the European Commission take the necessary steps to establish a representation in Switzerland in order to intensify the bilateral contacts and exchange of information between the European Union and Switzerland.

\*  
\* \*

Mr BONDE (EP) briefed the Swiss delegation on the Constitution of Europe. He gave his view on the consequences of the new Constitution and recommended the web page [www.euabc.com](http://www.euabc.com), where one can download the Constitution. He mentioned that the Parliament will get more influence and a bigger say with the new Constitution but will however still only be able to amend and not make decisions. He painted a picture of the Parliament as actually having the character of a council and the Council as doing the work of a parliament. Two visions for the future, one federalist and one intergovernmentalist were presented. He also informed the Swiss delegation that the European Union will have a permanent foreign minister and a permanent President instead of a rotating presidency with the new Constitution.

Mrs WALLIS described the summary of Mr BONDE as interesting and provocative. She underlined that she was proud of the right to amend and a discussion followed where Mr SKINNER (EP), MR SCHWAB (EP) and MRS HERCZOG gave their positive view on the new Constitution and underlined that it is improving the EU's institutions. After a question from Mr DAVID about who gains and loses power with the new Constitution it was again clear that the EU Parliamentarians have different opinions on this matter when MR BONDE's description of the EU institutions as winners and Member States as losers was contradicted by Mr SKINNER.

\*  
\* \*

Mrs BARSİ PATAKY (EP) briefed the Swiss delegation on the Railway Transport Policies. She summarised the history of the two Railway Packages and mentioned that a third Package on liberalisation in passenger traffic is expected around 2010. She saw the lack of implementation of the railway agreements in the Member States, which also applies to the bilateral agreement with Switzerland, as problematic and stressed the importance of implementation. Mr CINA (CH) informed members about the major investments that have been made in the Swiss rail transport system. He and the other members of the Swiss delegation wondered if Switzerland would get some return on their investment, which also benefits the EU. It was agreed that the investments were much needed and Mrs BARSİ PATAKY promised to discuss the financial perspective on her next meeting with the European Parliament Committee on Transport and Tourism.

\*  
\* \*

Mr SCHWAB and Mr DAVID introduced the Cross-boarder Information Policy and concluded that it is important to keep an open discussion on the various key cross-boarder issues. The air traffic at the Zurich airport and the nuclear waste disposal in Benken were particularly stressed as being areas where exchange of information is vital.

\*  
\* \*

Mr MÜRI (CH) briefed the European Parliament delegation on the Swiss Integration Policy. He stated that Switzerland has comprehensive Europe Policies, with membership in the European Council and EFTA. Switzerland is also active in the Balkans and intends to continue to provide economic help in that region. It was also mentioned that Switzerland is the EU's second largest trade partner after the US and that Switzerland helps to connect the northern and southern parts of Europe through its extensive railroads and tunnels.

\*  
\* \*

At the end of the meeting the Chairman of the Swiss delegation, Mr DAVID, invited the European Parliament delegation to Switzerland and the Fribourg area for the next interparliamentary meeting. It was scheduled to take place in July 2005.