

## SERVING SWISS-HUNGARIAN BUSINESS RELATIONS FOR THREE DECADES

**SWISS CHAMBER IN HUNGARY CELEBRATES 30TH ANNIVERSARY WITH BUSY SCHEDULE**

*The Swiss-Hungarian Chamber of Commerce (Swisscham Hungary) was founded in 1995 to provide a platform for economic and commercial cooperation between the two countries. Over the past three decades, the trust and expertise of its members and its steadily growing membership have made the Chamber an important player in business life.*

*On the 30th anniversary, President Dr. István Béres and Director Júlia Lipovecz, tell Diplomacy & Trade about the activities of the organization.*



"In this anniversary year, we are paying particular attention to organizing events where we can better showcase our individual members, and we are trying to find venues that are close to our members, or we are organizing meetings specifically for our members. On the one hand, this is a trend, and on the other hand, we want to celebrate the anniversary in a fitting manner. We organized a gala event in May this year, but we are also planning an economic forum for the fall, which will be a conference-style event where we would like to emphasize the many years of operation of Swiss companies and their importance in the Hungarian economy," Júlia Lipovecz highlights. Also this May, Swisscham organized a walking tour in downtown Budapest, focusing on Swiss companies that represent the Swiss presence with their diversity. This included a public poster exhibition showcasing Switzerland's past and present presence in Budapest, with one of the posters also featuring Swisscham. Both the walking tour and the posters provided a good overview of the history and unity created by the Swiss Embassy and the Swiss Chamber of Commerce.

### Colorful event portfolio

As to how the chamber's goal and activity have evolved over these three decades, István Béres recalls that "when we started, we focused on economic events and our advisory activities. We organized various events, such as professional forums or we invited the minister of finance or economy to give a presentation on a specific economic environment, and we could ask them questions. Over the last 10 years, there has been a growing demand for us to organize colorful programs as part of our networking activities. This can be done within the framework of

a large-scale economic forum but also during a gallery visit, a cooking class, a presentation organized by Victorinox, or a factory tour, so we moved more in the direction of such colorful activities. And what is very important that we were quite successful in getting members to come up with ideas, and from this we were able to organize the most successful events, such as watching the Blue Ribbon boat race on Lake Balaton and a forum organized around it. The biggest change is that the chamber has become very interactive, and the portfolio of events we offer them is very colorful."

### Sharing Swiss healthcare experience

One of the most recent partner events concerned the field of healthcare. The Director notes the importance of the project itself, "the fact that the Chamber managed to bring this healthcare forum to life. We have organized it three times so far, making it bigger and bigger. It is very important to us to have Swiss guests and the relevant Hungarian institutional representatives present, and I think we have achieved this quite nicely over the past year. So, it is clear that there is a demand for it, and there is also receptivity on the Hungarian side as they are open to learning about Swiss examples in healthcare, which may be good or bad – a nice little exchange of experiences. I think last year's study trip to Basel is also related to this. We organized that as well. Government representatives and institutional leaders from the healthcare sector were able to visit the Roche and Novartis campuses, and we coordinated that together with the Hungarian Embassy in Bern."

As the President points out, "everyone knows that healthcare is a very complex, huge system, not only in Hungary but everywhere. It is impossible to achieve change overnight, but at least we have

the satisfaction of having brought in decision-makers from Switzerland, people in senior positions in the Swiss healthcare system, who shared their Swiss experiences. With that, I think we have fulfilled our mission. How they use this information and incorporate it is beyond our control, but the information has been conveyed, and they were able to gain experience directly in Hungary and Switzerland.

### Sustainability in focus

Another very important area, especially for the future, is sustainability. The topic of an event organized jointly with the embassy at the end of April was 'energy communities'. Júlia Lipovecz stresses that they have been dealing with sustainability for years. "Incidentally, it is mainly the Blue Ribbon event that we dedicate to this topic, where government and corporate players take part in panel discussions specifically on sustainability, and we have some great little programs or projects when we plant trees or inaugurate insect hotels, and there will be more of these in the future, so this is also an area that we always bring up year after year." István Béres adds that they bring together different companies around this matter. "Everyone shares their experiences, the projects they have set or implemented at their own companies, and by hearing each other directly, they can consult directly on these topics."

### Important partners

Jean-François Paroz's second term as Swiss ambassador to Hungary is coming to an end soon. As for the cooperation with him and the relationship with the embassy, the Swisscham President underlines that "it is very important to us that as many people as possible attend our events and that we have high-quality speakers,

participants, exhibitors and roundtable discussion participants. The support of the embassy and the presence of the ambassador are very helpful in this regard, because the ambassador being present at an event gives it special weight and prestige. Ambassador Paroz enjoys this role and it suits his personality perfectly. He appears at the event and gives a speech that arouses people's interest in the topic. This adds a level of prestige to our events that we could not have achieved without him. Whenever we came up with an idea and asked him to participate, get involved or give a presentation, he always came, no matter how short the notice was, gave the lecture and elevated the importance and prestige of the event with his presence or a speech."

### Busy schedule

In summary of this year's past and future activities, the Swisscham leaders say that there was so much going on in the first half of the year that they don't have a complete schedule for the second six months, except to say that there will definitely be an economic forum and a visit to the Stadler factory, which we have already been agreed with the rail wagon producer. Of course, the usual HR and other events held regularly are going to take place. For many years, the Swiss Business Day was a regular event organized by the Chamber in Hungary. However, for a few years now, they have been going each time to a different city in the country and organizing the Swiss-Hungarian Economic Forum. This year, that city happens to be Budapest, so they are organizing such an event in the capital. They want a forum, which is a mini conference on bilateral economic relations to which they "wish to invite Swiss speakers and guests, and the new ambassador will be here by then, so we will be able to organize this sometime in the fall." **DSF**