Signing of the bilateral framework agreement regarding the Swiss contribution to the enlarged EU

Federal Councillor Doris Leuthard

Bern, 20 December 2007
Vice Prime Minister,
Ministers,
Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you that so many of you have been able to attend this important event. Your presence underlines the significance of the bilateral cooperation between Switzerland and Europe, and between Switzerland and the ten new EU Member States.

I thank you for your efforts and your commitment to a united Europe. It has been a long and rocky path for the former States of the Eastern Bloc. That you have resolutely stuck to this path and never lost sight of your goal our utmost respect and recognition. You have managed to conduct a successful and peaceful revolution and establish a system of social market economies.

And lastly, I thank you for your longstanding cooperation in transition assistance after the Wall came down and now in the constructive preparation of this framework agreement on the enlargement contribution. This enlargement contribution gives us the possibility to realise numerous projects in the public interest in a range of fields. I assure you that Switzerland will lend its full support to the implementation and realisation of this agreement. We can do so in the certainty that the majority of the Swiss people support this cooperation.

With this commitment, we wish to make a contribution to reducing economic and social disparities between the new and old EU Member States. If we join forces and are united, we can achieve a great deal. Together we could, for example...

- Increase energy efficiency in public buildings in Estonia,
- Support youth projects in Lithuania,
- Improve health care provision in Lithuania,
- Expand waste water treatment systems in Poland,
- Realise regional development projects in the Czech Republic,
- Maintain biodiversity in Slovakia,
- Make venture capital available to SMEs in Hungary,
- Strengthen community organisations in Slovenia,
- Launch vocational education programmes in Malta and Cyprus.
The implementation of such projects will have a positive effect on economic development in these countries. I am also confident that many Swiss firms will successfully bid for contracts from the enlargement contribution projects. We have a fair amount to offer. In Switzerland we have know-how in a wide range of fields and competitive offerings of goods and services. Beyond that we encourage our firms to take an interest in contracts from projects funded by the cohesion fund and other EU funds. The enlargement contribution could provide an opportunity for some firms to adapt their sales strategy to the rising markets of the new EU Member States in an even more targeted manner.

Ultimately, however, we hope that the enlargement contribution will not only lead to a strengthening of economic relations between our countries. It is equally important that mutual relations are also enhanced in other fields: in education, science and public health, on environmental matters, in culture and in politics. Here too we can benefit from one another and forge closer ties.

Distinguished Ministers, dear guests, I look forward to working with you on the realisation of our joint projects, and on behalf of the Federal Council I now have the pleasure of inviting you to take an aperitif before we dine.