

Switzerland calls, THE UNITED STATES RESPONDS

INTERVIEW WITH **DR MARTIN NAVILLE**, CEO SWISS-AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



BY **MARK BUCKLEY**, PRESIDENT AT ASSOCIATION "THE LOUNGE"

Can we briefly revisit your history in Lugano and define your main duties with regard to the relationship between both countries?

«The Ticino Chapter of the Swiss-American Chamber of Commerce has been founded more than 25 years ago to locally support the activities of the Swiss-American Chamber of Commerce. We focus on two main goals. First, we strive to improve the business relationship between Switzerland and the USA through information on the large

size and great importance of this bilateral business relationship and through fighting any restrictions and issues to the movement of goods, services, investments and people between our two countries. Second, we fight all issues restricting the optimal operations of internationally active companies based in Switzerland – Swiss and foreign, large and small. The Ticino Chapter currently has nearly 100 members and a very active board with 13 eminent personalities resident in Ticino. The Board is chaired by Franco Polloni of Banca del Ceresio».

TICINO WELCOME BOASTS AMONG ITS READERS A CONSISTENT NUMBER OF TICINO RESIDENTS WHO COME FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD. WE ARE DELIGHTED TO OFFER, IN EVERY ISSUE, AN ARTICLE IN ENGLISH, WHICH PRESENTS THE PEOPLE, EVENTS, COMPANIES AND SERVICES OF IMPORTANCE IN OUR CANTON.

From your privileged viewpoint, how would you describe the economic and commercial rapport which exists between the US and Switzerland?

What is the situation specific to Ticino?

«The USA market is the second largest export market for Swiss goods with 12.4% of total exports, right behind Germany (18.5%), but well ahead of exports to France or Italy. Swiss exports to the USA have grown by 46% since 2009, way ahead of the EU (4.7%) or the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) (32%). The USA exports more goods to Switzerland than to Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Austria – combined!

Direct investments by Swiss companies total more than US\$ 240 billion, making Switzerland the 6th largest investing nation in the USA. And US companies are by far the largest and most important direct investor in Switzerland, with key investments into the Swiss knowledge economy with investment such as Google, IBM Laboratories, Disney Laboratories, Medtronic and many more key innovative investments. The excellent relationship is overshadowed by the lingering judicial affair between the Swiss banks and the US Department of Justice and we all hope that this legacy of the Swiss Banking Secret will be put to rest in this coming year».

What opportunities, of specific interest to American businesses, are offered by the Canton?

«Switzerland, and the canton Ticino, still is a very competitive location to attract and retain US companies. With its political stability, its high quality of life, its moderate personnel laws, its motivated and well-trained personnel and its competitive fiscal environment, to name just a few key assets, internationally mobile companies still consider Switzerland in general, and Ticino specifically, a very attractive location. However, in the last few years, serious questions marks have appeared regarding the future fiscal regimes

(Corporate Tax Reform III), its openness to foreign specialists (Initiative on Mass Immigration), its future relationship with the EU and its questionable participation in a future Transatlantic Free Trade Zone».


What steps could be taken at a Federal and Canton level to make Ticino a more attractive proposal?

«The questions and uncertainties mentioned above have to be resolved as fast as possible. Uncertainties in key matters are a poison to any attractive business location. The governments on federal and cantonal level need to actively seek discussions with international companies to explain what has been happening in the past few years and to draw clear scenarios on how Switzerland and the canton of Ticino will retain the excellent framework conditions for international companies in Switzerland».

What risks does Switzerland face with a probable US-EU agreement to definitively set the conditions of free trade and transparency?

«Assuming the negotiations between the USA and the EU conclude successfully in a Transatlantic Free Trade Zone, Switzerland, together with the other EFTA countries, will probably be invited to co-sign the treaty. Because of the probably quite far-reaching agricultural market access provisions of the treaty, ratification in the Swiss Parliament and the subsequent referendum will have a difficult time. We have to do all possible to avoid a Transatlantic Free trade Zone without Switzerland! As the content of the treaty is not yet clear, the risk for Switzerland cannot be measured as yet. But not being part of a free trade zone incorporating nearly 70% of Swiss exports and 80% of foreign direct investments in Switzerland will certainly be a very uncomfortable situation».

One area of particular interest to you is education and training: what projects have you sponsored and what is in the pipeline for the future?

«Every year, the Ticino Chapter works with Prof. Colombo and a team of students from the Ticino University (USI) on a business-oriented field project. In 2015, the topic of the project will be “Family-owned enterprises in Ticino”, and will be presented on June 9, 2015, at USI». 

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 **Swiss-American
Chamber of Commerce**