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Swiss Russian Health Forum

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In October 2011 Moscow hosted a very successful first Swiss Russian Health Forum. A large Swiss delegation took part. This shows how many people are interested in cooperating with Russia. I am delighted to join you in Basel for the second Swiss Russian Health Forum.

Basel has long had connections with Russia. Some of Basel's great scientists have travelled to Russia. Daniel and Nicolaus Bernoulli and the mathematician and scientist Leonhard Euler studied in Basel. In the eighteenth century, they spent many years in the Russian capital of the time, Saint Petersburg. Their stay created ties between our countries.

Relations between Switzerland and Russia are excellent. I am certain we have a lot to gain from strengthening our cooperation and exchanges. Today's topic of health is an area where there is a lot of potential for us to work together.

The world faces considerable health challenges. The spread of chronic illnesses and caring for ageing populations are two of the problems we face. International organisations provide an ideal forum for exchanging ideas and trying to move forward together.

I therefore welcome the recent OECD report on the Russian health system. In 2011, Switzerland's health system was also examined by the OECD in collaboration with the World Health Organisation.

The aim of the OECD's reports is not just to highlight what countries are doing right, but also to see what reforms are necessary. The OECD and WHO encouraged us to place more emphasis on primary care and the prevention of illnesses. A new law is currently being considered by the Swiss parliament. Although it has met with some resistance in parliamentary debates, I hope that the law will be adopted.

The challenge we face in coming years is twofold. We must maintain high standards of care for all patients. At the same time we need to improve efficiency and keep costs down. Switzerland currently spends eleven point four percent of its gross domestic product on its health sector. Although we

have a well established system of subsidies, many families still find it hard to pay their health insurance premiums.

With ageing populations, our countries' healthcare systems are also going to face a growing need for trained medical professionals.

Switzerland has excellent medical programmes but there are currently not enough university places for students who want to study medicine. The Swiss Confederation and the cantons are looking for solutions to increase the numbers of medical students in our universities. Education and training is certainly one area in which we could strengthen our cooperation with Russia, for example through partnerships between teaching hospitals.

Even countries like Switzerland where everyone has access to healthcare face many challenges. My department is currently developing a healthcare policy strategy for 2020. The aim is to ensure a coherent approach so that we can make the most of opportunities to improve the system.

Health-related issues are taking up more and more space on the international agenda. Every country needs to take part in the international dialogue and get involved in solving the problems we face.

As a BRICS member, Russia has a major role to play. Much is expected of Russia as an economic and political leader in the context of the current economic and financial crisis. However the international community also expects Russia to use its influence in many other areas such as health.

During its presidency of the G8 in 2006, Russia included health for the first time as one of the priority discussion topics. In April 2011 Russia hosted the first global ministerial conference on non-communicable diseases. Russia also acted together with the Council of Europe as a co-organiser of the conference on the counterfeiting of medical products in October 2011. The Council of Europe's MEDICRIME Convention was opened for signing during this conference.

Switzerland is currently a member of the World Health Organisation's Executive Board. In our work at the WHO we support the search for constructive solutions that are likely to meet with broad approval. Our country would like to use its current three-year term on the Executive Board from 2011 to 2014 to place more emphasis on the importance of international governance and the central role of the World Health Organisation.

Switzerland was one of the first countries to draw up a national strategy on health foreign policy. All of the relevant government branches are associated with the policy. We strongly encourage participation by extra-governmental bodies like the Swiss Russian Health Forum. We hope that this coherent framework for action will help us to bring added value to the international debate.

Russia is a priority country with which Switzerland would like to develop its relations. I am delighted that life science is to be one of the focal points for cooperation between our two countries. An agreement is currently under way between the Swiss Federal Council and the government of the Russian Federation on science and technology cooperation.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that international cooperation on health does not only involve governments. Collaboration mainly occurs between those working within the healthcare system. That is why events such as the Swiss Russian Health Forum are important. The forum brings together doctors, scientists, and representatives from politics and business all hoping to make new contacts. It is these contacts that help to advance the causes of healthcare, science and progress.

With that in mind, I hope this conference will be a fruitful one for all of the participants and I wish the Swiss Russian Health Forum great success.