

THE SWISS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOR BELGIUM AND THE GRAND DUCHY OF LUXEMBOURG IN BRUSSELS

As part of the new orientation of our magazine, we interviewed Mr Philippe Kenel who, in addition to being a lawyer in Switzerland and Belgium as a partner of the law firm Python, holds the position of President of the Swiss Chamber of Commerce for Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, which is based in Brussels.

What role does the Chamber of Commerce that you preside play?

Our Chamber of Commerce is an old lady who shares with the Hotel Ritz in Paris the characteristic of having been created in 1898. For several decades, I would say that it carried out the "classical" activities of a Chamber of Commerce and received significant subsidies from the Swiss Confederation. As the latter stopped financing Swiss Chambers of Commerce abroad at the beginning of the 2000s, we were forced to rethink our role and operations. Today, the Swiss Chamber of Commerce for Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is a platform for meetings between Belgian, European, Luxembourgish and Swiss circles in economic, political and cultural matters.

Sky view of the Philharmonie © Palsa Pictures/LFT



Philippe Kenel, President of the Swiss Chamber of Commerce for Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg

How does the Chamber of Commerce live since it is deprived of State subsidies?

With more than 200 members, we live thanks to their contributions, sponsorship and volunteer work.

What is your position in relation to the other representatives of Switzerland in Belgium, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and to the European Union?

First of all, I would like to point out that the role of our Chamber of Commerce is to federate, build bridges and put people in contact, but under no circumstances to represent any community. For example, Swiss companies are represented in Brussels not by us, but by *economiesuisse*, whose representative is Mr François Baur. On the other hand, as soon as I was appointed President in 2007, I worked to ensure that all major Swiss companies and major Swiss associations operating in Belgium or the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg were represented on our Board of Directors in order to coordinate our activities. Today, I can say that I have almost reached 100%. Moreover, it goes without saying that the Chamber of Commerce does not represent the Swiss State. However, we maintain excellent relations with the Swiss embassies in Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg as well as with the Swiss Mission to the European Union. For me, the great advantage of Chambers of Commerce is that they are composed of people who are most often domiciled or present on a long-term basis in the country where they are located, unlike ambassadors and diplomatic staff who remain in office for only four years or representatives of large Swiss companies who very often stay only a few years in the same country.

What activities does the Chamber of Commerce carry out to achieve its objectives?

Each year, the Chamber of Commerce organises around ten activities, including at least three in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. We have three fixed events, the summer cocktail, the Christmas dinner and the New Year's cocktail, the latter always taking place in Luxembourg at the beginning of February. For the rest of our activities we try to mix serious and more recreational topics.

How do you communicate with your members and supporters?

Our communication policy is based on three vectors. On the one hand, we have a website (<https://www.chambredecommercesuisse.com/fr/>) that I recommend you visit. In addition, each year we publish a magazine, *Swissnews*, on a topical subject. For example, *Swissnews 2019/2020* focuses on the challenge of ecological transition. Finally, the Chamber of Commerce sends a quarterly *Swissletter* by e-mail, describing its activities and presenting a number of recent books on Switzerland.

Why would you recommend a company or individual to become a member of your chamber of commerce?

Becoming a member of our Chamber of Commerce allows an individual or a company to get in touch with a certain number of decision-makers in Belgium, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg or Switzerland and to get in touch with the various Swiss economic organisations as well as with the diplomatic missions present in these States. ■

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