

talking points.

The FDFA's take on current events



Hello,

Yesterday, I got to smell a comet. Don't worry, I had my feet firmly on the ground—although current geopolitical events are enough to make anyone feel dizzy. I was with [Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis](#) in **Osaka**, at the Swiss pavilion created for the World Expo that has just opened in the Japanese city. In this pavilion, Switzerland is also showcasing its expertise in robotics and artificial intelligence, not forgetting Heidi, a much-loved figure in Japanese popular culture. After Osaka, it was on to Tokyo, where cutting-edge technology remained a theme in discussions between the head of the FDFA and several Japanese ministers. Tomorrow, we're heading on to China, where the same issues will be on the agenda. Ahead of these current events, you can read below about the history and highlights of 75 years of Swiss–Chinese bilateral relations, from a telegram to an annual strategic dialogue.

Tariff issues, in the wake of the recent intentions announced by President Trump's administration, have been a topic of discussion in Japan and will be on the agenda during our meeting with the Chinese Foreign Minister in Beijing. **The United States** also features in this newsletter with Markus Leitner, Switzerland's ambassador to the United Kingdom, talking about his host country's 'special relationship' with the land of Uncle Sam. After that, we catch up with the FDFA staff who have just opened a humanitarian office in Afghanistan and finish off with some statistics about the Swiss Abroad.

So, all in all a distinctly **outward-looking** edition of the newsletter, with its finger on the pulse of the world—or part of it, at least.

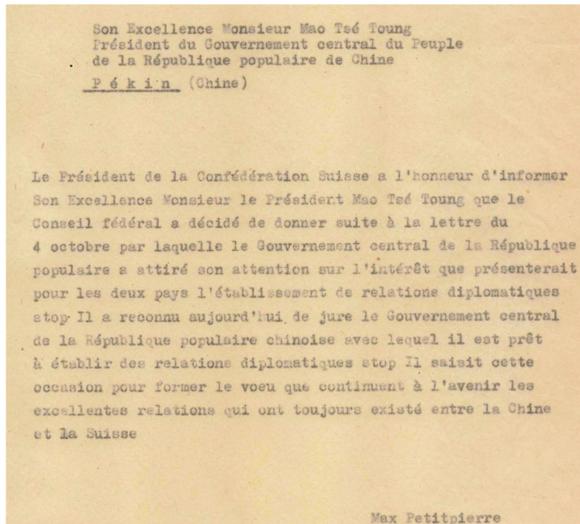
Happy reading!

Nicolas Bideau
Head of FDFA Communication

let's get to the point.

Switzerland and China

Stop. It's a **telegram**. Yes, Switzerland's bilateral relations with China started with a telegram ([dodis.ch/8016](#)). It was sent by then President of the Swiss Confederation Max Petitpierre to Mao Zedong in 1950 and saw Switzerland become one of the first Western nations to officially recognise the People's Republic of China.



Since then, relations between the two countries have grown stronger and become multidimensional. As this newsletter reaches you, **Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis** is preparing to leave Tokyo for Beijing, where he will meet Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi and representatives of Swiss companies based in China. What better opportunity to mark **75 years** of our bilateral relations with the country?

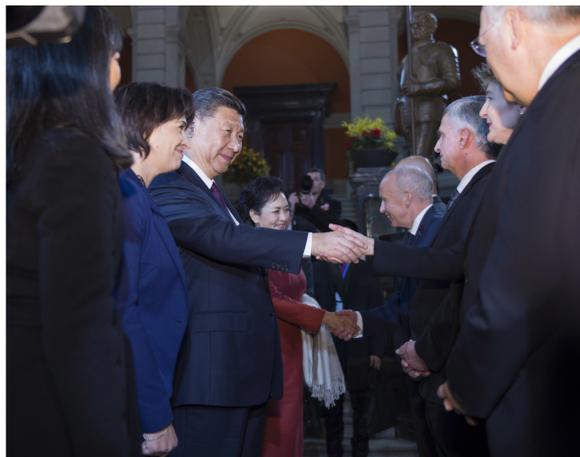
We'll take a look at the development and key features of Swiss–Chinese relations in **three points**.

First of all, **the economy**: The good relationship that Switzerland has enjoyed with China since diplomatic relations were established in 1950 (with the visit of Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai in 1954, and the transition from simple diplomatic representations to embassies in 1956/57) has always been a source of optimism in this area. The first Swiss economic mission, led by Federal Councillor Pierre Graber, visited China in the summer of 1974 ([dodis.ch/40499](#), top photo). It paved the way for the **first bilateral trade agreement** between Switzerland and China, which was signed in Bern on 20 December 1974 by Raymond Probst, Federal Council Delegate for Trade Agreements, and Chen Zhifang, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Bern ([dodis.ch/49504](#), bottom photo). A year later, the first Swissair service from Zurich to Beijing was established. Lift manufacturer Schindler then set up the **first Western industrial joint venture** with a Chinese partner in 1980, a year that also saw the creation of the Swiss–Chinese Chamber of Commerce.



We now jump ahead to reach another milestone: 2010, the year in which China became Switzerland's biggest trading partner in Asia. The final landmark is 2014, when a **free trade agreement** came into force between Switzerland and China—the first such agreement for any country in continental Europe.

The second point is **strategic dialogue**. Following President Xi Jinping's State visit to Bern in 2017, Switzerland and China decided to organise an annual strategic dialogue between the heads of the countries' foreign ministries, to complement the regular political dialogue. The aim of this meeting is to discuss current issues as well as topics linked to bilateral relations. The latest round of these discussions took place in China in February 2024. A critical and constructive approach, addressing the differences in values between the two countries, forms the **cornerstone** of the dialogue. In addition to this strategic dialogue, there are some 30 bilateral dialogues with China, conducted by various Federal Administration offices in their respective areas of responsibility.



One of them covers human rights, which brings us to our third point: the issue of **human rights**. This came to the forefront on 5 June 1989, the day after the events in Tiananmen Square. For the first time, the Federal Council condemned the 'violent repression of the Chinese people's demands for greater democracy'. It went on to call for 'moderation and respect for human rights in the name of the most basic humanitarian principles' ([dodis.ch/55413](#)). Switzerland and China have been holding a human rights dialogue since 1991. The subjects discussed include freedom of expression and the rights of minorities, including in the Tibetan areas of China and in Xinjiang. The latest round of this dialogue took place in China in February 2025.

While we no longer communicate by telegram, Switzerland's policy on China continues to be moulded, in the words of Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis in the foreword to the Federal Council's China Strategy, by **'pioneering spirit** and pragmatism, in addition to a strong stance in the defence of Swiss interests and values'. Stop.