

Swiss technology on display at new business conference

By Nerses Arslanian
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BEIRUT: Some 40 Lebanese companies attended “Swiss Innovation Days,” a two-day conference promoting collaboration and technological exchange organized by the Swiss Embassy and Berytech, a Lebanese business development center.

The event coincided with an official visit by the Swiss Secretary of State for Education, Research, and Innovation Mauro Dell’Ambrogio, who praised the local business climate. “Lebanon is ... the most open country in the region to do business with,” he said Friday.

The conference was set up to help Swiss and Lebanese companies in the clean technologies industry facilitate cooperation and the exchange of innovations and business models.

“Politically, we are not a major power in the world, but the Swiss are a leading example in innovations in science, education, technology, and business,” Dell’Ambrogio said.

The program opened Thursday with a seminar on education at Saint Joseph University followed by the “Clean Tech Innovation Conference” which featured speeches by Dell’Ambrogio, Swiss Ambassador H. E. Francois Barras, Chairman and CEO of Berytech Maroun Chammas, and CEO of the Centre Suisse d’Electronique et Microtechnique Mauro al-Khoury. The day concluded with the Watt d’Or exhibition, which showcased recipients of annual award given by the Swiss Federal Office of

Energy to projects that “offer a significant benefit for society.”

The second day of the program, held in Ashrafieh’s Hotel Sofitel Beirut Le Gabriel, saw Swiss delegates detail some of the technologies and advances being researched and implemented by their respective companies, including transparent solar panels, water distribution systems, and specialized insulating cement.

Asked what the Swiss companies represented at the conference could gain from the exchange with their Lebanese counterparts, Dell’Ambrogio cited the importance of foreign ventures to the Swiss economy.

“Switzerland has a high cost of living. The only way to export our services is to cooperate with foreign countries. For every one job in Switzerland, we need to create five from abroad to keep the business viable. The event is useful to exchange ideas, human capital, and technological innovations from both countries.”

The conference could become a yearly fixture, according to First Secretary of the Swiss Embassy Chasper Sarott. “Clean tech companies are concerned with clean technology in fields such as waste management, water distribution, and energy conservation. The Swiss companies are here to introduce some of this technology to Lebanese companies to expand their market.”

“This is the first time we [have held] this event,” he said. “Whether or not it will become an annual conference depends on how the Swiss companies respond [to] Lebanese businesses, but from what I can see,



A Swiss delegate talks to a local engineer during the conference in Beirut.

they seem very satisfied with what the Lebanese companies have to offer.”

Ramy Bou Jawdeh, Deputy General Manager of Berytech, said he hoped the event would promote mutually beneficial growth and ultimately create new jobs for skilled Lebanese workers.

“We want the Swiss companies to establish a foothold in Lebanon so that they may sell and distribute

their products more easily in the region. We also want to bridge the innovation gap between the countries by integrating some of the patents and technologies the Swiss companies have to offer.”

“Lebanon offers a lot of human capital. We have a lot of fresh college graduates in engineering and the sciences that have the necessary skills to put their knowledge in their

respective fields to good use.”

Asked about his participation, Anis Bejjani, managing director of Avantis Engineering, said, “My company focuses on designing, building, and doing business in power plants. I’m here to learn about the new innovations in my field that these Swiss companies have to offer.”

Karim Hashash, an environmen-

tal consultant for Sustainable Environmental Solutions, voiced similar motivations. “My company consults other companies in finding technological solutions by saving energy through photovoltaics, waste management, and energy efficiency.”

The conference concluded with the signing of a cooperation agreement between CSEM and the Lebanese University.