



Roundtable on Recently Ratified Free Trade Agreements and Benefits for Swiss SMEs *By Stephanie Welter, Latin American Chamber of Commerce in Switzerland*

After the ratification of the free trade agreements (FTAs) between Switzerland and Peru and Switzerland and Colombia, which entered into force in July 1, 2011, these two countries have become attractive destinations for Swiss SMEs. This is further enhanced by a strong Swiss franc and the economic downturn in Europe which has reduced the competitiveness of Swiss products in the region. In contrast, both Colombia and Peru have proven to be economically stable. A growing middle class and the development of specific sectors, such as infrastructure, linked to the governmental agenda, are other factors that make these markets potential targets for Swiss SMEs.

In light of this fact, Osec and the Central Switzerland Chamber of Commerce & Industry in partnership with Latcam hosted a roundtable on January 23, 2012 in Lucerne on ways SMEs can benefit from the free trade agreements. Speakers at the event were Corinne Schirmer, General Manager, Swiss Chamber of Commerce in Peru, Silvia Gutiérrez Díaz, General Manager, Swiss-Colombian Chamber of Commerce and Ulrich Hinterberger, Consultant Latin America, Osec. The presentations were followed by a roundtable discussion.

The event not only served as platform to learn about Latin America's emerging markets and the political and economic agreements among countries of the region. The opportunities offered by Peru and Colombia and the steps required to enter local markets successfully were also important topics. Following the formal part of the event, participants could continue raising questions and discuss further support with the experts from Colombia and Peru at the networking reception.



Ulrich Hinterberger, Osec, Silvia Gutiérrez Díaz, Swiss-Colombian Chamber of Commerce, Corinne Schirmer, Swiss-Peruvian Chamber of Commerce, Dr. Dorit Sallis and Stephanie Welter, Latin American Chamber of Commerce.



Ueli Hinterberger makes a presentation.



The roundtable discussion.



Networking reception.