

Uncertainties *and Certainties*

The international situation is increasingly polarized by serious and menacing uncertainties

By Jean-Daniel Clavel

On one hand, these uncertainties occur at the socio-economic level. The rhythm of fusions and displacements and the loss of jobs continue and, under pressure from growing demographic imbalances, pension funds decrease. The European and North American economies are weak and have a bleak future. We can take as an example the difficult circumstances of the automobile sector and its future effect on national economies. The increasing ecological and climatic problems we face make matters worse. The perspective is all the more worrisome because the polluters turn a deaf ear – they are all too busy increasing their gross national product.

On the other hand, there are uncertainties at the political level and relating to security. The situation has clearly deteriorated since 9/11. The measures taken to eradicate terrorism have not had the desired effect, but rather have worsened the situation. The costs of these measures represent a great loss in the other economic sectors that are affected by them. Meanwhile, positions become more radical while international dialogue becomes more difficult. These urgent circumstances beg for alternative solutions, which are just now starting to develop in many countries.

As unpleasant as this situation may seem, these numerous uncertainties may yet point to a certainty. National economies, international cooperation, and future generations may recover through the development of research and, most important, through education of the highest standard. A competitive new market in education already exists and involves centres of learning in Bombay, Moscow, Shanghai, Boston, London, Paris, Geneva and Zurich, among other places.

Nevertheless, contrary to competition practiced by multinationals in the field of industrial production or computer services, competition in the education sector is also ruled by factors unique to this particular kind of enterprise including whether the local political and social climate is suitable for

study; whether the educational institution is a laic organization impervious to ideological pressure; and whether a stimulating university and cultural environment exists as a window to the world.

The presence of modern scientific and technological tools also represents an essential advantage for students, researchers and professors. This is particularly the case in fields such as biotechnology, the nanotechnologies, medical research, new materials, or alternative energy resources. Taken from this perspective, a Swiss education without a doubt occupies a unique place in the world.



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Born in 1946 in Lausanne (VD), Switzerland

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1967-1969	Swiss forest service
1975-1985	Secretary of embassy, Madrid, Spain; Lima, Peru; and Caracas, Venezuela
1976	PhD in science and technology, ETH Zentrum, Zurich, Switzerland
1985-1986	Counsellor, Swiss delegation to GATT/WTO, UNCTAD and ECE/UN
1986-1990	Coordinator for the CSCE, Vienna, Austria
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