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Ambulance aircraft (British Aerospace BAe 125-800 B-type) of the Swiss Air Rescue Service over the Swiss Alps. (Photo: Rega)

Bicycle cross-country world championship: Pascal Richard wins Gold. (Photo: Andreas Blatter)

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Editorial

The European challenge



It is a great pleasure for me, as new Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, to be able to address you for the first time – you, this Fifth Switzerland which in its own way contributes towards forging the place of our country in the world.

True, Switzerland's foreign policy is conducted from Berne under the overall responsibility of the Federal Council within the due competence of my Department and under the watchful eye of parliament and people. But we know very well, too, Switzerland, in the international context, also owes a great deal to the physical presence of its citizens abroad, in almost every country in the world. And, of course, the Foreign Affairs Department has its missions in all parts of the world to protect the interests of Switzerland and its nationals.

As my task begins, I would like to reiterate both the obligations and the lines of force of our foreign policy – a policy grounded more than ever on neutrality and living on universality – the expression of which in action is both service and solidarity.

It is in this spirit that I would call to mind two future events which concern us all. In 1991 the Confederation will celebrate its 700 years of existence, a moment to dream of, if only to contemplate the past and to consider the future. All the more as the following year, 1992, – and this is the second event – the Single European Act will further consolidate the European Economic Community, this common market which is so close to us, yet from which we are separated by a great step.

Now, while 1992 will doubtless affect many among you, it will also have its effects on Switzerland as a whole, for the majority of our fellow-citizens living abroad reside in the countries of the Community. With this in prospect, the Foreign Affairs Department recently set up a «think tank» on Europe. Its aim is to oversee all aspects of our political relations with Europe, so as to clear the options which would allow us to determine the future with optimum accuracy – to safeguard the place of our country on the continent of Europe.

One should not infer from this that our relations with the other countries will be neglected. Indeed, on the contrary, it is in firmly consolidating Switzerland's roots in Europe, that its position in the world can be best evinced. Who cultivates his roots cannot but blossom out, and your presence all around the globe is the daily proof of this.

R. Felber