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The new concept for the jubilee celebrations of the Confederation

Thus we celebrate

The author of the following contribution, former Ambassador Dr Heinz Langenbacher, was a member of the «think tank» charged by the government to work out a new set of ideas for the 700th jubilee celebrations of the Confederation, after the people of the cantons of Central Switzerland had turned down, in spring 1987, the original concept for «CH91», with its overdone events.

Festive occasions can only be celebrated in company. Company means encounter. This gave us the leitmotiv of the jubilee year: «Encounter 1991». A second dominant theme of the new concept is what we have called culture exchange. It is on these two themes that a three-part fête should be proclaimed in 1991, an occasion not only to be celebrated in a ceremonious and meditative manner but also, and above all, in a festive and happy way: the Festival of the Swiss Confederation, the Festival of the Four Cultures and the Festival of International Solidarity.

Festival of the Confederation

The great birthday party starts on 31st July 1991 with a trip in boats to the Rütli, where, in a simple ceremony, the *Bundesbrief*, the first Federal Charter, and the Renewal of the Confederacy are read out by writers from all four linguistic regions. More than 3,000 schoolchildren, representing all the communes in Switzerland, as well as the Swiss abroad, carry the message of the Rütli out into the towns and countryside, where it is again read out at the Swiss national holiday celebrations of the communes on the evening of August 1st.

The official celebration of 1st August takes place in Schwyz within the format of a procession followed by a festive, colourful and light-hearted programme of events including traditional and modern musical and theatrical happenings. Here, too, the Swiss abroad will be represented by a delegation. The fête in Schwyz will be followed by a big public festival in

Brunnen on the weekend of 3rd/4th August. It is in Brunnen that the Place of the Swiss Abroad, together with the Path of Switzerland round the lake of Uri, will be formally inaugurated; where the 1991 Assembly of the Swiss Abroad will take place, towards the end of August; and where, at the same time, the Swiss ambassadors will meet, in Central Switzerland, for their traditional annual conference. Thus, it should be possible for all those taking part in the two events to meet and to visit the Schwyz Festival Performance. Lastly, a jubilee tree will be planted by the young people as an expression of the unity in diversity of all communes in Switzerland.

Festival of the Four Cultures

This festival will celebrate the cultural diversity of Switzerland and, in an «Operation Encounter» based on private initiative, will build bridges between the citizens of the four language areas. Fêtes, meetings and talks will bring people of the most disparate population and occupational groups together, throughout the year. The problems and possibilities of the cultural diversity of Switzerland will be the focal point of a decentralised Culture Forum. The highlight of the festival, in August 1991, is to be an ambitious national Culture Spectacle in Lausanne, whose centre of attraction will be artistic productions from all four linguistic regions on the theme of «Switzerland: 700 years on».

International Solidarity

The jubilee should of course promote not only mutual under-

standing among the Swiss but also between Switzerland and other nations. The 700th birthday celebrations afford the Swiss people a splendid opportunity to reflect upon its position in the world, and at the same time to manifest its solidarity with the community of nations – especially with those who live in want and distress. Here, too, the keynote is encounter and cultural interchange, with examples as follows:

A *state ceremony* in Berne with foreign guests and a speech by the President of the Confederation – a sign and symbolic gesture to the world.

A *fund* will be opened as a gesture towards the Third World. This fund will finance an *Exchange Programme* and a *Jubilee Prize* to be awarded for work and achievements which foster intercultural exchange or which develop models for overcoming the social, economic or ecological problems of the Third World. A *Ceremony of Solidarity* in Rhaeto-Romanic Switzerland in August 1991 will bring the Swiss and people from all continents together.

How does it go on?

The government will soon decide on the new concept (which has been very well received by the general public). Then a delegate and an executive committee would go ahead with the implementation of the projects. We must hope, that those responsible will tackle the job with energy, vision and the courage to dare the unusual; that a global concept on the («good Swiss») way towards practical realisation will not again crumble to a heap of rubble for want of consensus and because of perfectionism pushed to extremes – perfectionism marked by painstaking efforts to save money and by bureaucratic red tape.

At all events, this much is certain: a journey to Switzerland in 1991 will be worth while.

Heinz Langenbacher

Political rights

Well done!

Parliament in Berne stands up for the Swiss abroad: following the example set by the National Council, in March, the Council of States charged the Federal Council, in a parliamentary motion, to grant the Swiss abroad the right to vote by post. Thus, the government is now obliged to set the ball rolling with an appropriate amendment to the Federal law on the political rights of the Swiss abroad. With this decision, an issue which the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad has persistently championed for years has been brought a great step forward.

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CSA meeting

Under the chairmanship of its President, Professor Walther Hofer, the Commission of the Swiss Abroad met in committee on 19th March 1988 for its spring session. In dealing with some current questions of expatriate-Swiss policy, it was able to record with satisfaction that in the field of postal voting rights a clear parliamentary brief now lies before the Federal Council (see article on this page). Further, the committee took a stand on the statutory regulation governing the advancement of the education of young Swiss living abroad. In particular, the Commission advocates that as many young Swiss abroad as possible should benefit from the support measures provided for in the new Federal law, whereby, above all, teaching in the Swiss minority languages be given special consideration. It was also noted that the Commission had been kept fully informed about the current position and progress of the project for the Place of the Swiss Abroad.

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