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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERATION TO THE SWISS ABROAD

AUGUST 1st, 1974

Dear Compatriots Abroad,

Each year on August the first we Swiss think of the founding of our State, the Confederation. I am particularly happy, dear fellow citizens, that today I may talk to you. I send you my warmest greetings and convey to you the best wishes of the Federal Government and your fellow-countrymen and women here in Switzerland.

With our attention being held by present-day problems, we scarcely find time to look back into the past and celebrate with solemn respect the anniversary of the birth of our nation. I say this, knowing that we cannot wisely shape the future without a respectful appreciation of what has been achieved up until now. But lately there have been so many changes and upheavals that we must summon all our strength together if we are to overcome the difficulties of the present and of the future. Following a long period in which stability, economic growth, industrial peace and full employment seemed firmly assured, much is now being put in question. Great efforts will be necessary if this development is to yield positive results.

We are confronted in a very direct way with the question of economic growth, the limitations of prosperity and the harsh realities of voluntary restrictions. The shortage of energy, raw materials and certain types of foodstuffs has made us aware of our precarious state of dependence. It forces us to reconsider our situation and to accept this as a challenge. Above all, the oil crisis has proved in an emphatic way how difficult it is to steer a structure as complex as the modern world economy on a changing course. The efforts towards a reform of the monetary system, the liberalisation of world trade, the intelligent adjustment of international investment activity, and the development of the Third World—all these have without doubt suffered a setback. Storm clouds are gathering and are threatening the liberal world economic order, accomplished during the last 30 years in intricate and painstaking detail. What this means for a country like Switzerland, which is so strongly inter-connected with the world, can perhaps be even more readily understood by you who live abroad.

Closely connected with this situation is the inflation—which we partly import and partly create ourselves. Inflation may be to the benefit of some, but it is also to the disadvantage of others; it undermines stability, creates a climate of speculation, and inevitably leads to increased social tension.

Despite all efforts, attempts to break out of the vicious circle of the increasing cost of living have until now been unsuccessful. Yet we must not give up our efforts, for it would be disastrous to relax

in the fight against this unfortunate trend and the spreading of an inflation-mentality. It would mean living at the expense of our economic future, and that sooner or later we would have to foot the bill—in both the social and political fields. Up until now the strength of our economic system was measured by the growth of our prosperity. And in the wise management of our prosperity we shall in future have to prove the enduring qualities of our political system. We shall have to give up many creature-comforts if the price is too high or if they create unacceptable dependencies for us. These are evolutions which go far beyond pure economics. They raise as much the question of solidarity within our national community as they demand a cutback of a hectic development which has gone beyond the natural limits of the human mind and spirit.

Although the future thus holds all kinds of difficulties for us, we do not want to face it with too much pessimism. There are many people who have recognised this precarious situation and are prepared to work together to overcome it. And there is no reason why we should not continue to have faith in our peoples proven strength and determination to master its own destiny. From this strength and determination springs our Federal Constitution, which this year is one hundred years old. Its outward appearance may have grown somewhat outdated—which is why we are at present in the process of overhauling it from top to bottom.

But the very inadequacies and contradictions of our basic national laws reflect the active determination of our people always to adapt our institutions to the needs of the day—the aim being to strengthen the position of our small neutral country abroad and to enrich the life of our community through tolerance, solidarity and the legal provisions of our constitution.

I know the mere word of the constitution and of the existence of democratic institutions are not enough. What is needed is also a human involvement that enables us to break out of the narrow circle of our own personal interests and to understand the fundamental truths of our Swiss existence with clarity and alacrity.

From my contacts with many of you, fellow citizens abroad, I gather that this is the sort of attitude you expect of us. Let us hope that this expectation can be fulfilled, and that in this way we can truly express our gratitude to those Swiss abroad who with great loyalty share with us our problems, and efforts aimed at preserving the well-being of our common homeland.

To you and yours I wish health and prosperity, success and satisfaction in your work, and happiness and peace of mind in your family.

Ernst Brugger,
President of the Swiss Confederation.