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THE MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERATION

Otto Stich, to the Swiss Abroad on the occasion of August 1, 1988

Today's Swiss National Day celebration once again gives the President of the Confederation the opportunity to address you directly and to discuss topics of national policy - present and future.

But first allow me to extend my heartiest greetings and best wishes from home to all Swiss living abroad. I would also like to thank you deeply for the role you play as representatives and spokesmen for Switzerland in your countries of residence. Many of you continue to fill that role although your new country has long been a second homeland for you. You all belong to those Swiss who have put a decisive stamp on the picture that non-Swiss have formed of this country. For this valuable and indispensable service, our thanks.

In recent months, the majority of the more than 400-thousand Swiss living abroad may have become aware that the country in which they are now living is strongly motivated by a desire to form even closer economic and political ties with other countries. I'm speaking of the 60 percent of all Swiss who live in the member states of the European community. Switzerland intends to use all its influence to continue operating as freely as possible as a trader in goods and services with the EC. Switzerland also wants to keep its position as a transit country and a destination point in the heart of Europe so that road and rail traffic can continue running without interruption in and through this country. But we also want to ensure that, as a result of our position as a junction in Europe, our environmental protection measures will not suffer.

We should pursue these goals relentlessly in the future when Switzerland possibly has to re-organise its relations with a European community that is moving closer together. We should not adopt the attitude of the rabbit which sits wide-eyed and horrified in front of the snake. There's no reason for this because both sides, Switzerland and the members of the EC, have known each other for so long as reliable partners. But interdependence between Switzerland and the EC is only one aspect of our foreign policy. It also characterises our relations with the rest of the world.

For this reason we should not neglect our contacts with states outside the EC. We should nurture them just as carefully. Moreover, we are called upon, in view of the gap in development between north and south, to support development everywhere. Our economic relations are based on a policy of openness to the world and this should also determine our cultural and humanitarian relations. As a neutral country, we continuously offer our good services not because of our size, but because of our strength and our possibilities to help in places where others can no longer act.

But solidarity should not only be a trademark of our international relations. And it wasn't. The spirit of solidarity in relations between Swiss at home and Swiss abroad has been eloquently expressed through your participation in our social programmes by voluntary payments to old-age pension and invalidity schemes. To this I may add the solidarity and aid funds for needy Swiss abroad and the financial aid to institutions such as Swiss schools abroad.

Now for the first time, another opportunity has been created by which Swiss abroad can show their solidarity with their native country. On the occasion of the 700th anniversary of the Swiss confederation in 1991, a square devoted to the Swiss abroad is planned in the town of Brunnen on the shores of Lake Lucerne opposite the birthplace of Switzerland - the Rutli meadow. The square will be at an ideal location within the so-called "Path of Switzerland" which is a project of all 23 cantons. The Place of Swiss Abroad is to be financed mainly through contributions from Swiss abroad. The Confederation welcomes this idea and the support of the Swiss abroad.

Solidarity inside and outside Switzerland, the protection of Swiss interests in our constantly changing world, and the deepening of the humanitarian traditions - these are the values which we want to cherish in the future. In this way, you can spread the good reputation of Switzerland through your families, your friends, your acquaintances and by this you can contribute to Switzerland's continuing efforts in favour of a more peaceful world.

To all of you taking part in this August 1 celebration around the world, I extend to you my best wishes for your health and prosperity.



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