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Address by Federal President Ruth Dreifuss to the Swiss living abroad on the occasion of Swiss National Day, August 1, 1999



Ladies and Gentlemen, members of the community of Swiss abroad. On the occasion of Swiss National Day, I extend to you warm greetings from the government and an expression of its profoundest respect. Our government is all too aware what this country owes to its citizens living outside its borders both for its prosperity within and its image without. The government is also very aware of and deeply touched by the closeness you have always had to Switzerland. It's a closeness that unites you all today throughout the world as our small country scarcely visible on world maps and classroom globes, celebrates its national day. It's an occasion not for displays of pride or arrogance, but rather a time to reflect on the fact that a small country cannot manage without ties around the world. Here in Switzerland, we know the crucial importance of these ties both economically and culturally. We wanted our country to exist and, together with others, we brought it into existence. But it doesn't continue to exist by virtue of our strength alone, nor only by our own work or energy. We have received much and we have given much. Above all, we have given what to us is our most valuable resource; our men and women, our labour, our scholars and our artists. Frequently their talents did not bloom until they were in foreign countries. Switzerland thrives on mutual exchanges. The war in the Balkans, which has provided Switzerland with a fresh supply of labour, has also strengthened the awareness among our people of their obligations towards asylum seekers. Dear members of the Swiss abroad community, some of you have no doubt not had an easy time of it settling in your new countries. All of you have been faced each day with other cultural realities and customs. So you know what it means for a foreigner to be accepted and respected. You also know that Switzerland wouldn't be Switzerland if it didn't welcome strangers. Don't forget that. In the Spring of this year, voters accepted the revised Federal Constitution. The revised Constitution reflects the importance we place on the moral foundation of the State and confirms our belief in the values of Freedom, Democracy, Independence and Peace. We did it, according to the preamble of the Constitution, "in a spirit of solidarity and openness to the world". Those among you who intend to continue living outside Switzerland will, I hope strengthen your ties with this more open, more understanding Switzerland. To those of you preparing to return to this country, I hope you will find a nation showing more solidarity. To each and every one of you, on behalf of the Swiss government, I wish you a happy celebration.

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BEREAVEMENT NOTICE

It is with great sadness that I must advise of the very sudden death of **Michelle Koeppel-Schneider**, wife of Franz Schneider, who left our Embassy and New Zealand in June.

Michelle passed away very unexpectedly in hospital in Lugano, due to heart failure, at the young age of only 43 years, on Friday, 9th July. She, Franz and daughter Iris were holidaying in Switzerland prior to taking up a new posting at the Embassy in Moscow. Her funeral service took place on 15th July in Rorschach, CH.

On behalf of the membership of the Swiss Society, I would like to convey our deepest sympathy and condolences to Franz, Iris, and all of Michelle's family. Her passing is a great loss.

At this sad time, our thoughts and prayers are with Franz and family. Michelle was known especially to members of the Wellington Club, where she was an active member, contributing to the Helvetia during her time as Secretary, and much enjoying the Club's regular Sunday walks with her family and friends.

May she rest in eternal peace.

Contact address:

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Beatrice Leuenberger, Society President

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