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1 August 2018 at the Residence of Switzerland in Upper Hutt

Address by David Vogelsanger Ambassador of Switzerland

Dear Fellow Citizens

E na mana
E na reo
Rau rangatira ma
Haeremai, Haeremai

Ka pirangi au ka hononga o te aka
huiterangi ki na iwi Maori

No naianei faka maumahara tatou i te
korero nehe huiterangi fitu rau rua tekau
ka fitu tau noa atu.

I tera wa kau ke te Maori tuatahi
Aotearoa.

We commemorate today the 727th anniversary of the founding of our Confederation. It is comprised of twenty six little republics. We call them cantons and you see their flags around you. They are sovereign and each of them has its own constitution, parliament and government. They have, long ago, pooled part of their sovereignty, part, not all of it, in a Confederation that is in charge of our relations with the world and a number of other issues. These cantons themselves are constituted by 2255 local communities that set their own rules and are in total charge of their tax rates and financial affairs. That is a reality we are proud of, and at its base lies a decision making process where the people themselves have the last word on all important matters. We call it direct democracy.

The wonderful country that hosts us, New Zealand, is small like ours. It is democratic like ours. It believes in individual freedom and equal rights for all its citizens like we do. It believes in human rights and in the rule of law, both at the national and at the international level, like we do. It maintains, as we do, that small nations must have the same rights as the more powerful ones. It strives to be a force for peace in the world, like we do.

Yet, New Zealand has a history very different from ours and its shores could not be further away from our mountains. Its democracy that most of you share as citizens of both countries is based on a sovereign parliament with a central government, not directly on the people's voice and a federal system. But on a day like this, let us reflect for a moment what both New Zealanders and Swiss cherish most.

We all believe that the highest value belongs to the individual human being, man, woman and child. Each of them has rights, and for men and women also duties to the community. We believe that these rights are equal. Therefore both countries tend to regard unfounded privileges with deep suspicion. We both want a government that is only as powerful as is absolutely necessary to maintain peace at home and abroad and to take care of those who cannot take care of themselves, not more.

We will not let anybody tell us what to think or what to write or what to say. We know better than any government or administration what is good for us and for our families. And above all, both of our peoples, Kiwis and Swiss, are marked by a profound and modest decency anchored in the history of our nations.

Representing our country, I had the privilege of getting to know many of New Zealand's most important leaders. They, too, are very decent people. Political disagreements are healthy in a democracy and there are many. But there is no hatred and nastiness in this country's politics and a remarkable consensus when it comes to foreign affairs. Switzerland and New Zealand see eye to eye on almost all international issues and have practically no disagreements.

There is one exception, Superannuation deduction of Swiss pensions. We consider this policy neither just nor fair. The issue has kept my staff and myself busier than any other in recent years. But we listen to each other, as the most important Swiss parliamentary delegation to ever come to New Zealand has experienced just a few months ago. I am confident that Parliament will soon find a solution for this difficult issue.

New Zealand is also, believe it or not, the country in the world with the highest proportion of Swiss citizens. We count 7000 registered with this Embassy and estimate at least another 30'000 descendants of Swiss immigrants. As you may know, the first Swiss who visited, but did not stay, was the artist John Webber who came with Captain Cook in 1776, the year the United States decided to get rid of King George III.

This year, the commemorations of New Zealand's contribution to liberty and to a more peaceful world in the Great War of a hundred years ago will end. You all know what ANZAC stands for. I had the privilege to represent our country in many of these ceremonies during my time as your Ambassador. As Swiss who have been spared the horrors of war for the last two hundred years, we have every reason to be modest, grateful and respectful when looking at this country's history. New Zealand had only a million people in 1914. A hundred thousand of them fought in a terrible war far from their little country, in the Middle East and in Europe. Twenty



1 August 2018 at the Residence of Switzerland in Upper Hutt

continued from page 11

thousand gave their lives for others and for what they considered simply right. The same happened once again, only a quarter of a century later, in World War II, and in Korea, Malaya and Vietnam.

It is for this reason, to be modest, grateful and respectful, that I have laid yesterday, together with Minister of Defense Ron Mark and in our country's and all of your names, a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Wellington. It has been a moving moment, and one of the veterans of the 2nd New Zealand Division, whom I have visited in recent months in different parts of New Zealand, has honoured us with his presence. His name is Reg Pycroft, he is 96 years old and lives in Porirua. He stands for many others who have risked and often lost lives and limbs for our freedom from tyranny.

This is the first and maybe the only time that I address you on our proper national day. We all have fond memories of a bright summer day with our Swiss families in one of our villages and towns, with a member of the community being invited to give a speech - I have myself done so many times -, children parading with their lampions, a barbecue and a mighty fire lit that reminds us of the time when watch fires on the mountain tops were part of our defense.

It is hard to organize this kind of celebration in the middle of the New Zealand winter, and we have replaced it in recent years during the southern summer with the commemoration of a battle of 700 years ago or simply a traditional mountain village feast. This year is different.

For the first time in history, the Swiss Army comes to New Zealand. It comes of course with the most peaceful instruments in its arsenal, musical instruments. We are proud of these young men who have just completed their basic military training and serve their first annual army duty in the country farthest from home. They are young soldiers, but in civilian life already accomplished musicians. I am thrilled that I could convince our highest military command to send them on a 40'000 kilometer mission, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Robatel and conducted by First Lieutenant Axel Catillaz. Thank you so much. You have made this year's national day a very special one, indeed.

We are proud of these young soldiers as we are proud of our Army that has protected our own freedom in two World Wars. The world and our own European continent are becoming once again more and more risky places, and the Swiss people in their overwhelming majority support their Army as the most important instrument of peace and security. Our Army, of which the Air Force is a part, is not a professional one like the New Zealand Defence Force, but one of young citizens who give a year of their lives, or in many cases more, to the safety of the community and to peace. They wear the same uniform that their fathers and grandfathers and many of us, including myself, have worn with conviction and pride.

The magnificent tour of New Zealand by this band went from Auckland to Stratford and New Plymouth in Taranaki and to Wellington. It ends today here in Upper Hutt. The tour would not have been possible without the enthusiastic support of the New Zealand Defence Force, the Parliament and Mayors. Mayor Guppy hosted a beautiful concert with our band and the Royal New Zealand Air Force Band last night. Both bands were invited today by the Right Honourable Speaker Trevor Mallard to play in front of Parliament, the seat of New Zealand's democracy. Trevor as the former Hutt MP is an old friend of this Embassy. For all this we are very grateful. To have seen the field grey of our citizens' Army next to the dark blue of the Royal New Zealand Navy and to the light blue of the Royal Air Force Bands while listening to our traditional Swiss and to Kiwi tunes will leave all of us with unforgettable memories.

This concludes my remarks, and I will spare you for once a lesson in Swiss history. I do not know yet if I will have another opportunity to address you on our national day, but I very much look forward to other moments we will share during the coming year. Having been your Ambassador has been one of the best periods of my life. My wife Laura and I are grateful for all the friendship and hospitality we have experienced in New Zealand and above all in the Swiss communities all over both islands. A great soldier once said: "Old soldiers don't die, they just fade away." An Ambassador is a servant of his country just like a soldier. I therefore intend to borrow this sentence when the time comes.

God save the Queen and may he bless the people of New Zealand and our Confederation!

A similar address was pronounced at the 1 August celebrations of the Swiss Club of Auckland on 28 and of the Swiss Club of Taranaki on 29 July.

The 1 August celebration in a tent in the garden of the provisional Swiss Residence in Upper Hutt was attended by over four hundred people, among them Swiss citizens, friends of our country, a number of Members of Parliament, Chief of Defence Force Air Marshall Kevin Short, Ambassadors and High Commissioners as well as representatives of other authorities. The guest speaker was former soldier and civil servant Sir Harawira Gardiner. Two Swiss citizens were especially honoured by the Ambassador for their outstanding service to the Swiss community in New Zealand: Outgoing Auckland Consul Peter Deutschle for his twenty-five years of consular activity with the moving "Appenzeller Landgemeindelied" performed by the band and an original Landsgemeinde sword (mandatory for a man to vote in his home canton) and Roland Schütz, for many years and until very recently president of the Swiss Club of Wellington, for whom the "Berner Marsch" was played and who received a large Bern flag.

