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# The Swiss Observer

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## NEWS AT RANDOM

### Federal

Early on August 1st the President of the Confederation, Federal Councillor Stampfli, broadcast an official address to our people of which the following is a summary in English:

"In solemn gratitude we remember to-day the foundation of the Swiss Confederation. We are filled with reverence and gratitude to the kind fate which permits us to spend this day in our valleys, villages and cities in the peaceful way to which we are accustomed, and to know them unharmed after nearly five years of war. We also feel respect and gratitude for the men of the Rütli who laid the foundations of our State, made them firm and strong enough to defy all storms throughout six and a half centuries, and permitted us to remain a haven of peace, and freedom, to this day.

Finally we bow in deep respect and emotion before the powers that be, when so many peoples—who, like us, wished to continue to enjoy the blessings of peace—have been swept into the horrors of war.

The foundation of the Swiss Confederation was laid at a time which had much in common with the present day. It was full of uncertainties and dangers. The Federal Covenant of 1291 recalls the evils of that time, which brought together the people of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, and made them swear to assist one another with advice, with their lives and property, within and without the valleys, against anybody who might inflict violence, vexation or injustice on them, or on one of them; should there be differences between the covenanters themselves, then no foreign judges, or such who are themselves murderers or have received orders from foreign rulers should judge them, but the wisest among the covenanters must settle the differences in such a way as they deem constructive.

There is no doubt that the first Federal Covenant represents an interesting political document, whose significance in terms of time and space reaches far beyond the conditions for which it was actually intended. The refutation of any foreign rule and the mutual obligation for assistance against any threat were its main purposes. Its advantages were so manifest that one after the other, further cantons and townships joined

the union. Thus a community of states was formed which, despite its occasional lack of unison, was always able to master differences in such a way that it was able to conserve its independence and freedom against the outside world. Even though the Confederation, in contradiction to the principle of freedom on which it is based, proceeded to enlarge its domain by creating new relations between ruler and ruled, and even by annexing territories with a different language, the political forces entwined in the old Federal Covenant of 1291 were strong enough to prevent the disintegration of a state structure arranged in such multifarious ways.

In this way the Confederacy developed in the course of the centuries into the multi-lingual state which is often considered a model abroad, because it has succeeded in uniting peoples of different languages in mutual respect and recognition of equal rights, in peaceful collaboration for the welfare of their common Fatherland. With this example alone, Switzerland has achieved a place of honour among the nations.

The liberation from alien rule, and protection against any threat from without, had not yet been safeguarded by the Federal Covenant. Because these claims were directed against powerful masters, they had to be fought for and defended in a number of fierce and dangerous battles. That was the heroic age of the old confederates. Made wanton by their military successes, they were tempted into using their strength not only in defence of their own freedom and independence, but to lend it to alien princes for their power politics. This deviation from the basic idea of the first Federal Covenant led to the defeat of Marignano, which caused the state to adopt that neutrality which, for four centuries, has been the decisive factor in our foreign policy. Thus the neutrality of Switzerland is not an accident, but an obligation imposed on her by history, and nobody has the right to doubt its inviolability. That is why we may expect that in this war, too, our neutrality, carefully observed by us, will be respected to the end.

But neutrality does not mean the abandonment of integrity and soldierly spirit. These two qualities bequeathed to us by our ancestors, are the indispensable prerequisite of our national defence. They must be maintained unweakened until the cessation of hostilities if we wish to be prepared against surprises. The obligation to mutual assistance, which was so emphatically formulated in the Federal Covenant of 1291, has acquired a wider meaning through the centuries, expressed in the motto: "One for all; all for one". This appeal to solidarity has become our motto in all efforts for the common good and in social policy. Hardly an important social scheme has been put into practice without reference to the social obligation arising from the Rütli spirit.