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SWITZERLAND'S BIRTHDAY

SIX hundred and ninety years ago today three valley communities swore to resist together any violation of their rights. They were not demanding new rights, they were asking that those they had achieved should be respected.

So it was not a revolution, but on that day a decision was taken to defend rights which, except for one short interval, were never to be surrendered.

You all know the most important stages in our history. This year you have had a special reminder of one of them: the Treaty of Stans and the entry of Cantons Fribourg and Solothurn into the eight-member Confederation.



THIS was the address given by Ambassador Claude Caillat during the National Day celebrations held at Chelsea Old Town Hall.

Our history, like every country's history, did not proceed without a few skirmishes. But it has seen steady progress towards the difficult balance between personal freedom and a sense of community, and towards social justice. This would hardly have

been possible without perseverance, a sense of proportion and a solidarity which respects diversity.

We reached a high level of social justice and personal freedom quite early on in our history. And I am proud to note

that we are not resting on our laurels but are still trying to improve matters.

This year – ten years after women finally obtained the vote – we have seen further progress: the principle of equal rights for men and women, for women and men, has been embodied in the Constitution.

We are accustomed to think of ourselves as a small country because we take the surface area and the size of the population as a yardstick. If we measure ourselves by other standards things look quite different.

Switzerland is the twelfth most important trading nation in the world. And after the United States, but coming before Saudi

A principle we should cherish

WE ARE living in a world of upheaval, a world of fast-changing and unpredictable developments. War, ideological conflicts, social tensions, economic crises in many parts of the world fill us with concern. And many Swiss citizens living abroad are confronted directly with these problems.

Switzerland is often envied for its liberal order, its social peace and its well-being. But our nation also has its problems, in particular the current conflict between the generations forces us to reflect.

Job security is causing us concern. Each and every one of us has to do his best if we are to maintain peace in freedom in our everyday lives and if social justice is to be realised.

In addition, the unstable international climate demands of us a particular effort if we are to maintain the full employment necessary to assure continued economic growth, the purchasing power of our currency, and a reasonable level of prices.

In other words, our domestic peace, social and economic order, and independence are not a matter-of-course.

This year marks the 500th anniversary of the historic Convention of Stans. And it is

The President of the Swiss Confederation, Mr Kurt Furgler, sent this message to the Swiss abroad on the occasion of Swiss National Day

perhaps fitting that on this anniversary we should meditate on the message of Niklaus von Flüe.

This excursion back into Swiss history can only serve to give us confidence and re-assurance. For history teaches us not only to recognise and to respect our limits. It also shows us that pressing problems can be overcome, if we are strongly united and pursue a policy of dialogue.

This year we are also celebrating the 500th anniversary of the entry of the cantons of Fribourg and Solothurn into the Swiss Confederation. The lesson to be learned from this anniversary is clear – that in the future as well, Switzerland can exist only as a federal state, as a solid Confederation in which our communes and cantons are closely linked as cultural as well as political communities.

But active federalism does not only mean adherence to traditional values. Our Confederation needs to adapt to the changing times. It requires real reforms to enable it to meet the challenges of the future.

It is no mere coincidence that in this anniversary year, 1981, the

new distribution of tasks between the Confederation and the cantons is beginning to become effective.

Of paramount importance here is not only the maintenance and strengthening of our cantonal autonomy – by means of judiciously and clearly defined responsibilities – but also the partnership and solidarity between our various communities.

Swiss citizens should be able to identify themselves more closely with their federal state and their local authorities. When we have reached this important goal, we shall have made a major step towards a happy future.

Partnership and solidarity within Switzerland, but also beyond the borders of our tiny nation. Our country also has its part to play in contributing to peace in the world and in combatting misery and need.

We are becoming increasingly aware that development co-operation also has its advantages for Switzerland. Our efforts and endeavours in this field serve not only our partners, but also create new markets for our industries and thus promote our own

economic development.

Give and take – a principle of which we Swiss should not be ashamed. Give and take – no one knows the importance and advantage of this principle better than you Swiss living all over the world!

Dear compatriots abroad, we here in Switzerland all have reason to be grateful to you. Grateful, because you constantly succeed in forging strong and stable links between your homeland and your new, adopted homes.

Swiss citizens living abroad are as familiar with our traditions, our ideas, our joys and sorrows, as much as they are acquainted with the history, the qualities and the difficulties of their host countries. You are called upon to convey an honest image of Switzerland, and to arouse understanding for your homeland.

It is also your task to bring your host countries closer to us at home here in Switzerland. To continue to show us that life also has its qualities beyond our own narrow frontiers, that we can also learn from other countries.

Switzerland – a country conscious of its traditions, but a country open to the world. You, dear compatriots abroad, are a symbol of both.

Arabia, she is the second most important trading partner of the European Communities, themselves Number One in world trade.

This means that all developments in the world economy affect us acutely – almost one in every three francs is earned abroad – and we bear a considerable responsibility in the further shaping of the world trading system.

It is also very much in our interest to defend the degree of liberalisation that has been achieved and to improve it if at all possible. This applies, in particular, to finding a mutually satisfactory solution in North-South relations. It is regrettable that Switzerland is not yet a member of the organisation which gives priority to such problems.

A country as closely bound up with the outside world as ours cannot be indifferent to the idea others have of it. Switzerland has retained a good image, thanks also to your activities and those of all the Swiss abroad.

We all know what its components are: a fondness for work, a serious outlook, a respect for minorities, a determination to defend ourselves, and a sense of social responsibility. But an image is never acquired once and for all, especially in an age like ours which so often lays undue emphasis on the sensational event.

If youth unrest breaks out in a city famous mainly for its banks many people jump to the conclusion that Switzerland's once idyllic image needs to be urgently touched up. But the idyllic, like the uniqueness of Switzerland, is a mere figment of the imagination.

It is not typical of Switzerland that she has no problems, but it is typical of her that she fights to regain her balance with unusual perseverance and has an almost instinctive distaste for extreme solutions.

Compatriots, in accordance with tradition I bring you the best wishes of the Federal Council. The authorities in Berne know what outstanding service you are performing for our country through your activities abroad, and they are grateful.



The bells ring out ... celebrating the 690th birthday of the Swiss Confederation

A question of nationality

DURING the National Day celebrations of the Manchester Swiss Club the Consul-General, Mr Urs Karli, gave this review of some of the problems now being discussed by the Swiss government:

IN the course of many lengthy meetings and numerous consultations the so-called Furgler Commission has prepared the draft for a new federal constitution. The text has not only been submitted to the cantonal governments but also to a great number of relevant organisations.

If you keep in mind that our first Constitution was drawn up in 1848, revised in 1874 and that since then had innumerable adjunctions, it becomes clear that a new text which will meet with the approval of a majority in Parliament and of the people truly is an enormous undertaking. Although a date for the plebiscite has not been set yet it is expected that the people will be asked to vote in the next two or three years.

A much smaller legal problem

which, however, is of great importance to many of you is the question of nationality for the children born to a Swiss mother and a foreign father. Up to now Swiss nationality for the child can only be claimed if it is born in Switzerland and if both parents are legal residents there before the birth.

In this case, too, a text has been prepared which would enable the authorities to grant Swiss citizenship to a far greater number of children of a Swiss mother and a foreign father. As this text has to be examined by many authorities and organisations it will take at least two years before the respective bill is submitted to Parliament.

There are a number of other questions which do not concern the Swiss abroad, except those who plan to return to Switzerland, such as the new financial framework dealing with federal income and outlay and defining the financial obligations of the federal and of the cantonal governments, or the so-called tax harmonisation – meaning the introduction of guidelines which

would reduce the big differences plan to set a binding date for the beginning of the school year in the whole country, to name just a few.

As to our external relations, the biggest problem in store is whether or not we should join the United Nations. Our government is preparing a recommendation to adhere to that international organisation which will be voted upon by the people, probably next year. In spite of the reluctance of many Members of Parliament to solve the question soon, the Federal Council is of the opinion that the question of becoming a member of the UN has been discussed long enough and that it is time to come to a decision.

The same applies to the proposed change of our status in the Common Market. As you all know Switzerland is an associate member and not a full member. This has its advantages and its drawbacks which need perhaps to be examined more thoroughly. It therefore appears that in this case it will take a little longer to prepare the respective bill to be dealt with in Parliament.