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NATIONAL DAY MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFEDERATION TO THE SWISS ABROAD



Mr. Roger Bonvin

Dear compatriots,

It is a great pleasure for me, on this National Day, to bring you the greetings and best wishes of the Federal Government and to be able to stress in this way the ties between our country, Switzerland, and its nationals abroad.

This festive occasion on August 1st gives us the opportunity every year to observe the affection felt for their homeland by our compatriots dispersed all over the world, and this day is particularly suitable for discussing our common problems.

Most of you, today, do not regard Switzerland simply as your native country – you also think more or less constantly of how people live back home and of the changes which are also occurring there. In this connection, allow me to mention some of the outstanding developments in the past year.

First of all, we must recall the historic vote of last December which brought Switzerland closer to its European partners. The conclusion of an agreement with the European Community which in no way prejudices our status of neutrality, should have consequences extending beyond trade relations between the countries concerned. This was a decision which affected us all equally and which will have decisive importance for the future of our country.

The last few months have been marked, as everywhere in the world, by economic and monetary difficulties. In

order to deal with economic and financial threats, the Federal Government has been obliged to submit to Parliament proposals for urgent decrees. In this connection, we have been able to realise how much a small nation needs to co-operate with other States, since monetary questions, in particular, cannot be separated from the decisions which other countries, whether European or not, have to take.

I note with genuine satisfaction that Switzerland has removed yet another obstacle to the ratification of the European Human Rights Convention – I am referring to the special denominational articles in the Constitution. A negative decision on this issue would undoubtedly have met with still less understanding abroad than here at home.

After indicating these important developments, I should also like to mention and clarify a number of specific points which receive our attention not only on this First of August but throughout the year – matters concerning Swiss citizens abroad.

This spring the Federal Government submitted to Parliament a message on new regulations regarding the military tax for Swiss abroad. We hope that we have thus found a satisfactory solution which will meet with your agreement.

I should also like to remind you that the Federal Government has been trying to work out a practical and favourable solution to the problem of voting rights for Swiss abroad. This step

should strengthen the ties linking you to our country.

I can also assure that the Federal Government is constantly concerned to develop Swiss schools abroad, which are a link between the fatherland and our Swiss communities all over the world.

We are also aware that the constant improvement and intensification of our foreign relations do not rest solely with the Federal Government. We also need your help, perhaps even more now than in the past. Today, more than ever, Switzerland must try to make its contribution to mutual understanding throughout the world. We are convinced that this evolution can be guided only partially by political factors and that it undoubtedly depends largely on the attitude of each one of us, particularly those living abroad. Each Swiss abroad is a representative of Switzerland, and his personal reputation reflects on our country. So I am grateful for the part you play personally in upholding Switzerland's reputation and in contributing to the preservation of peace in the world.

I am happy to take the opportunity of our National Day to thank you all, my dear compatriots, for your work. I firmly rely on your collaboration; your support enables us to fulfil the tasks we must assume with respect to other countries.

So, on this National Day, I send you best wishes from the Federal Government and the Swiss people.

Roger Bonvin
President of the Swiss Confederation