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SWITZERLAND'S PLACE IN EUROPE

Speech given by the President of the
Confederation on the occasion of Europe Day,
Sils, 7th September 1991

The highly symbolic theme running through the final phase of the festivities marking the 700th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation, starting in September, is clear for all to see. The President of the Confederation is called upon to speak today, here at Sils, on this Europe Day. He is also thrilled to be able to look forward to enjoying shortly the great honour of participating as an official guest of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and inaugurating the opening ceremony in Bruges for the academic year of the College of Europe.

This concluding phase of the festivities is thus largely devoted to Europe. This is a good thing. For there can be no doubt that the future of Switzerland too will depend largely on the ways in which she is able and willing to develop, within an appropriate time-scale, her relationships with our continent, as it becomes more united.

If you were to ask the average Swiss what Europe means to him, the reply would be simpler than you might imagine. Europe is made up of the lands which surround us, the plains to which our rivers flow, the friendly neighbouring cities which welcome us as soon as we cross our narrow frontiers; Europe is a part of ourselves, and we are a part of her. That is how it has always been. That is how it will always be. The Swiss are Europeans because geography, nature and culture determine that it should be so: they speak the same languages - German, French, Italian, the imperilled Romansch - as the large neighbouring countries whose fascinating culture Switzerland too claims as her own. Understanding is quick and easy, because it is founded on a common history

dating back a long time. The memory of the rôle his forefathers played in Europe runs in the blood of every Swiss. The rôle played by the oldest cantons, for example, in the Burgundian wars, until the battles of Grandson and Morat. Many French-Swiss will never forget that that rôle was the start of their Helvetian destiny. Others remember Pavia, Novara or Marignano, where a similar outcome resulted for the Italian-Swiss. The Swiss will never forget the impact that Europe had on their antiquated structures, through the victorious French Revolution. They are well aware that without the goodwill of the Europeans at the Congress of Vienna, Switzerland would never have become what she is today.

In a nutshell, Switzerland belongs to this continent which, more than any other, laid the foundations for civilization as we know it, through technical developments, yes, but mainly through the emphasis placed on human rights, modern liberties and democracy. And the Swiss are proud of all this.

But the Swiss are well aware that this continent of theirs, for all it developed, nurtured and cultivated more than any other the values of Christian charity and of freedom and liberty, yet more than any other that same continent violated and betrayed those values. A dramatic and unfathomable paradox! The Europe of Thomas More and Saint Francis, of Rousseau and Schiller, is the same Europe that generated the most atrocious wars, the evils of colonial exploitation, the barbarities of nazism, fascism and communism. The most recent instances of these atrocities were experienced in all their grim reality by many Swiss who now belong to the elder generation. They felt threatened by Europe, their own Europe. These not-so-ancient fears thus contribute to the discordant, contradictory feelings the average Swiss still sometimes has towards the Europe that surrounds him. On the one hand an enviable, passionate sense of belonging, on the other an ingrained suspicion - these are the complex legacy of history. We know only too well how far down the roots of history go, roots which are often intangible and

sometimes even unconscious, but which penetrate deep into the minds of men.

But history moves on, and does not necessarily repeat itself. Europe is a case in point. In these last few years of her most turbulent millennium, she is going through a new and marvellous experience. The Europe of wars, dictatorships and oppression, the Europe whose states were in perpetual conflict, is giving way to an unfamiliar landscape where peace, democracy and freedom reign. Needless to say, we must avoid triumphalistic interpretations of current events, we must not wear our rose-tinted spectacles all the time. To those Europeans who have never before had the good fortune to live in a democracy, for example, the road ahead is fraught with obstacles; but it is also the road to abundant progress, fantastic progress, as the historic events in the Soviet Union these past days bear witness. The essential requirements of protection and safety for every nationality and every culture -

requirements that we might today sum up in a single concept, that of the defence and promotion of minorities - are far from being entirely satisfied. The dramas being played out in Yugoslavia and the disappointing outcome of the recent Geneva Meeting of experts on national minorities, where many surprising instances of insensitivity on these matters were seen, are evidence of the long road that still remains to be trodden. Some even fear that one day new autocratic powers may come to the fore on our continent, which might, as in the past, become potential sources of grave danger.

Ladies and gentlemen, naturally no-one can afford to live in a realm of dreams and Utopias. Human society, where contradictions and constraints are felt in the first place by every individual in his or her own mind, will never be totally free from tension and conflict. But we believe that, beyond this elementary truth, a Europe truly united in freedom and peace (and let us hope also in both internal and international solidarity and respect for nature) will represent the most potent guarantee that potential causes

of fresh conflict can be circumscribed,
controlled and counteracted.

The extraordinary historical changes we are living through have fundamental consequences for Switzerland too. These may be summed up in terms of a categorical imperative. Our relationship with the new Europe must transcend the former prudent vision of bilateral economic advantage based on free trade. The challenge facing our generation is to establish this relationship on a higher level, on a truly institutional level, which will enable Switzerland to play her full part in the process - which will not be a brief one - leading to the new European order for the millennium that is even now knocking at our doors.

The Federal Council has no doubts about this categorical imperative, which will require a substantial change in a policy of caution and sometimes even sceptical reserve which dates back over thirty years. But the challenge is also issued to Parliament, and most of all it is issued to yourselves, my dear fellow-citizens. For it is worth

reminding ourselves and our European friends
of one thing: just as in the past, when
the war came, an entire people can defend
their frontiers, so today the peace-loving,
democratic voice of the new Europe
challenges the direct responsibility of an
entire people. The people alone will one day
pronounce the definitive decision. It is the
fundamental duty of the political
authorities to bear that fact in mind. I
assure you, here in Sile, ladies and
gentlemen, fellow-citizens of Switzerland,
that every last thing will be done to ensure
that the process whereby we draw nearer to
Europe evolves in a climate of constant,
active dialogue, with every one of you, with
the entire population.

Ladies and gentleman, I therefore exhort you
to take the road to Europe!

But what will the road from Switzerland to
Europe be like?

Whatever happens, the path towards Europe will have to be worked out as rationally and as carefully as possible.

Naïve, open-handed enthusiasm must be avoided; it never was a sound adviser for the formulation of a policy giving firm priority to the rapid achievement of a declared objective. Naïve enthusiasm is as counter-productive, I would say, as the over-emotional opposition now rife in some quarters. We must be suspicious of rushing headlong, as people who were formerly sceptical and "anti", but who now view Europe with resignation, almost like an inevitable destiny written in the stars, may well be tempted to do. There is no historical determinism channelling Switzerland unavoidably into the arms of Europe! The path we take will be solely the result of our rational sense of history, our common will, our deep-seated convictions. Our linking up with Europe will never be the result of decisions taken by individuals. The alternatives are crystal clear: either the path to Europe will be the product of mature consideration, of informed common

intentions on the part of the public authorities, federal, cantonal and local, and of the united sovereign people; or else, for many long years to come, it will not exist, but will remain at most the subject of interminable sterile debates.

The common will must be formed bearing in mind at least three basic principles of conduct; in order to observe these, the Helvetic mentality, which tends to be rather perfectionistic, will probably have to undergo some incisive changes:

- a) The approach to Europe demands an organic, global vision which rules out minute, nit-picking objections. Any attempt at harmonization involves making sacrifices on the altar of higher interests, compromising, being ready and willing to give up or amend ancient and often hard-won practices, which mean a lot to people. Employers and employees, farmers and ecologists, social workers, transport workers, health workers: in the last analysis every Swiss man and woman must realise that it will not be

possible to safeguard positions which may well be very worthy, but are limited to one sector - and at the same time play a full part in Europe!

So for example, it would in my view be quite unthinkable to place the possible EEA agreement in jeopardy on account of some financial disagreement regarding the allocation of the cohesion fund (on the contrary, the solidarity we so strongly desire as an essential characteristic of the Europe of the future calls upon the rich countries - Helvetia among them! - to be especially open in this regard).

- b) The approach to Europe does, however, demand a transparent sincerity when it comes to those fundamental elements which affect what I would define as our common philosophy of the Europe of the future.

When it comes, for example, to the irreversible growth of democracy, parliamentary government and the widest possible popular collaboration against

all types of pre-democratic situation or
bureaucratic distortion; when it comes
to decentralization, federalism, the
rights of the small man, the rights of
minorities. When the things at stake are
the basic equality between countries and
hence their very dignity. as, it seems
to me, in the case of the institutional
aspects of the EEA, which are far from
satisfactory in our view, then the
discussions must be conducted as
transparently as possible. No
misunderstandings must be allowed to
affect the values which represent the
very *raison d'être* of the new Europe.

- c) I would add that the debate about these
values involves Switzerland particularly
deeply. Our objectives and to a certain
extent the fact that we have been guilty
of tardiness over Europe ought
undoubtedly to lead us today to adopt
especially modest attitudes. But this
proper modesty will never justify
submissiveness or downright abandonment
when it comes to expressing without
reservation our vision of fundamental

values.

A country which is governed by subtle, refined forms of direct democracy, a country which is in the forefront when it comes to the practice of the complementary skills of federalism, and which is certainly exemplary in the way in which it respects even the tiniest minorities, has a moral obligation to bear witness to her experience. She will do all this without being at all presumptuous, but rather with the humility born of conviction and of the practice which embodies it.

It is not impecible to tackle today the individual subjects of the wide-ranging discussions that are under way. I shall, however, rest content with saying that, quite apart from the negotiations about the European economic area and the decisions that the Federal Council will be taking, the discussions will also have to be resumed on the whole question of Switzerland's relationship with the EEC.

The seemingly more and more doubtful attractiveness of the possible EEA and the considerably altered circumstances of the continental order must prompt us to tackle afresh the search for other roads leading to Europe. Above all, the question of membership of the EEC must be reconsidered, we must take another look at the reasons which just a few years ago led us to give a negative reply. Without wishing in any way to prejudge the outcome of this re-examination, I was anxious to point out today the need to conduct it, and the willingness of the Federal Council to do so within the shortest possible time-scale.

Finally, we know today that European unity is no longer limited to the narrow boundaries imposed by the cruel post-war situation. Today it is possible at least to take in with one look a landscape embracing this whole, wider Europe of ours, the true, entire European continent, from the Atlantic to the Urals. The shape of Europe to come, once she is finally free, is absolutely

unpredictable at the present time. What is certain, however, is that no individual State, no community of States, can claim to possess a monopoly of the continent. The work we do together during these years will be decisive in forging this new order and shape of things. The more successful we are in striking the elusive but indispensable balance between a substantial unity in peace and democracy and a vast, irreversible decentralisation, attaching importance, as Switzerland strongly desires, to differences and diversities and not to power and authority, the more stable will be the order and the shape that emerge from this unique period of history.

Ladies and gentlemen, fellow-citizens of Switzerland, that is the fascinating message which resounds today through this mountainous land where diverse cultures meet, called Engadina.

It is an urgent call for Switzerland to assume her full European identity, with all the legal and institutional implications that that entails.

It is an invitation to Switzerland to undertake this historic journey, without haste and without any headlong rush, but with all the seriousness required by this extraordinary moment in history, and with the unclouded sincerity demanded by our idea of a democratic, peace-loving, solid and environmentally responsible Europe.

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