

*Translation of the address by Ulrich Bremi, Speaker of the Swiss House of Representatives, given at the Rütli Meadow, 1 August, 1991*

My fellow citizens,  
Very honoured Council Presidents of Europe,  
My distinguished colleagues of Swiss Political Life,

What does the Rütli mean to us? 700 years ago, it was the scene of a revolt, and at the same time a political awakening. It is the gateway to our confederate history. It is here that Switzerland was born, with all its many dimensions, contradictions and cultures, brought together in its simple republican tradition.

The Rütli represents not a retreat, but an advance. I say this out of the conviction that also today, it can be no retreat, but once again a point of departure in the shaping of our future.

It is the place from which we set out. It is the ancient source from which we derive our strength to give birth to new ideas. We do this now, not in the dead of night as when the Pact of Everlasting Alliance was sworn, but in the bright light of Swiss openness and before the Presidents of the Parliaments of European Nations.

You, the distinguished ladies and gentlemen of European Parliaments, honour us by your presence in this self-willed centre of the Continent. You have come here as an act of appreciation of our history. For this we thank you.

You, my distinguished colleagues in Swiss national and cantonal government, have come here because you share responsibility for this country at this moment in time.

You, my fellow citizens, look to the Rütli today because you want to know in which direction we are going. Where are we headed?

There can be but one answer: Europe.

When I say Europe today, I do not mean Western Europe. I mean all of Europe: The Europe of Western European Cultures, and the Europe of the new democracies taking shape in the East. I mean a Europe that is awakening, and a Europe that is in a state of upheaval, stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals; from the Mediterranean to the far North.

We Swiss are deeply imbedded in this continent of peoples and cultures. We may not be in the middle of it, but we are in its heart. Let us not forget that the heart of the Human Being is also not located in the exact centre of the body.

3

Our continent poses a challenge to everyone, and Switzerland is no exception. First of all, it challenges us economically. And here I am very confident. With sacrifice, strength, and dignity, the people of Central and Eastern Europe are taking their destiny into their own hands to produce lasting change. And the nations of Western Europe are ready to help. The formula for economic change in Central and Eastern Europe is a free market. And the material support to make this possible exists. Free Trade must and will create new trust.

But we are not only challenged economically; above all, we are challenged by cultural conflict. Everywhere on this continent that the grip of dictatorship has been released, cultural conflicts have flared up, as people seek their freedom and independence.

Linguistic differences collide. Religious affiliation leads to conflict. Boundaries set arbitrarily by Imperialism break open. Peoples stand opposed to each other, republics against republics. History has caught up with Europe, and we are dismayed. This is not what we expected after so much peaceful revolution. We fight each fire as it breaks out, attempting at the same time to avoid the spiritual and geographic narrowness of past centuries.

I am less optimistic about this second challenge than I am about the first, because we lack handy recipes. But probably there are no ready-made solutions that republics

and regions can simply try on for size. It will probably also require patience and time. But time and patience alone have not been enough to free and unite Europeans. It takes much more.

Our imagination and determination are what is needed to peacefully solve the cultural, political, and human conflicts that shake us all. I know, this is easy for a Swiss to say. Our country had 700 years to develop into a functioning, multicultural democracy. During those 700 years, things were not always peaceful. There were threats and violent disputes. This meadow also bears witness to that.

But we have accumulated historical experience in dealing with each other. And when I say "each other", I refer to the differences in language and cultural; regional identity; and nationalities in our country.

Today, we are proud to be a functioning, multicultural democracy. But this pride is also an obligation. It is the obligation to work actively and with much dedication, to participate in the solving of the enormous problems with which our continent is confronted.

Permit me - in the presence of our European guests - to be self-critical. We Swiss are still very self-centred. We have still not departed from the role of being the unconcerned, untouched nation.



Economically-speaking, we are more international than many nations. But politically, we are still too passive. In Yugoslavia, a multiethnic state is disintegrating in the confusion of civil war. Switzerland is a multiethnic state. What of a concrete nature have we offered Yugoslavia? Would it not be the noblest mission of our multicultural diplomacy to prepare and offer solutions? Is it not time for Swiss political scientists and trouble-shooters to appear among the European ranks on the Yugoslavian Front? We still offer too little of our experience; of our success; also of our internationally-gained material success.

But I know that we are on the road to becoming a truly European nation. I know that we feel compassion with the nations burdened by troubles. I know that we are committing ourselves more and more with our whole strength and with our whole sensibility to that of which we are capable.

The Swiss are not selfish. They are capable of solidarity; of devotion; and of genuine friendship.

Here on the Rütli, the cornerstone to our Confederate Alliance was laid 700 years ago. And today, it must be the point of departure of a modern, European Switzerland. If we take seriously the Spirit of the Rütli, we will accept the challenge of becoming a Switzerland behaving in a truly European way.