

EMBARGO: 2nd May 1980, 14.00

Speech by M. Georges-André Chevallaz, President of the Confederation, on the Occasion of the Visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness the Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh

Rütli, 2 May 1980

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In choosing to visit the Meadow at Rütli, where, in August 1291, the alliance between the three mountain cantons, the origin of our Confederation, was sealed, Your Gracious Majesty has profoundly moved the Swiss people. History throughout the centuries has a great influence on all our destinies. Technical revolutions, fashionable ideologies and the turmoil of our time cannot efface it. On the contrary, the great lessons of the past are borne out by our difficulties and our disarray.

In July 1940, at the time when the totalitarian powers, as a result of their military successes, had the greater part of continental Europe at their mercy, the Commander-in-Chief of our Army assembled all his commanding officers on this spot. The war was not finished, our country was surrounded and menaced by the axis powers. We had to remain armed and to prepare to resist. We thus renewed in the Second World War the Oath of Alliance of the three cantons, their will to aid and support one another, and their refusal to accept the tutelage of overlords and the jurisdiction of foreign judges in their valleys. The influence of history! In the same month of July in 1940 you found yourselves alone in holding out against those who, in their craze for power, thought they had re-shaped Europe in their fashion for a thousand years.



You stood firm under enemy bombing. You kept your faith and gave back courage and hope to those who resisted. There is no doubt that those who, in the 13th century, had laid down the foundations of liberty through the Magna Carta, were a model and an example to you in times which were so much more difficult for you than for us.

The Swiss people, by their affectionate and enthusiastic welcome for your Gracious Majesty, have expressed their esteem and their gratitude to the Britain of the past and the Britain of the present. May Heaven grant our peoples happiness and liberty and, if necessary, the will to defend them.