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A word by the Ambassador on our Federal Day

Fellow-citizens and friends of Switzerland:



On behalf of the Confederation and also the entire Embassy team, I wish you all, on the 1st of August, a wonderful 724th birthday of our nation, whether you celebrate

it at the height of the New Zealand winter or in summery Switzerland. On this day, we Swiss do not put politicians at the center of attention and even less military might, but we get together in our families, villages and neighbourhoods, far from home, like here in New Zealand, in our Swiss clubs. We are thankful to many generations of our ancestors who worked and sometimes fought hard for what we enjoy today. And we remember what is written on the rim of our largest coin, DOMINUS PROVIDEBIT, God will take care of it.

Today is also an opportunity to thank you for welcoming my wife and me so warmly in your communities, not only in Wellington where we live, but also in Taranaki, Hamilton and Auckland. I hope to spend the 1st of August itself with some of you in the South Island where I – a former Prime Minister told me: disgracefully - have not been yet after almost a year in New Zealand. A number of trips to the little island countries the Embassy also covers have kept me busy until now. I told you last October, after my arrival, that I had always wanted to live here one day. I can tell you now that my expectations have been fully met. Not only is New Zealand one of the two most beautiful countries in the world - you know of course the other one -, but her people are in many ways like us: down to earth, reliable, responsible, respectful of others, wary of authorities, stubborn and more than a trifle egalitarian.

The Charter of 1291, our founding document, does not mention a precise date, but only the beginning of August, nor the beautiful Rütli as the place where it was sworn. The Confederation was renewed, this time with a precise date and place, at Brunnen, just opposite the Rütli, on 9 December 1315. Only a few weeks before, on 15 November, and only a few kilometers away, it had withstood

its first important test at the Battle of Morgarten. 1315 is therefore at least as important a date as 1291. Our country remembers in 2015 700 years after Morgarten – just as New Zealand, this past April, has remembered in such an impressive and dignified way 100 years after Gallipoli. Morgarten means for us the courage to be different from others, more critical of government action, trusting the wisdom of our people as the supreme political authority.

Why all this history? Because, together with the presidents of your clubs, we have decided to remember this year Morgarten in New Zealand with a big party at the Swiss Residence in Wellington to which you will all be invited. We hope to enjoy with you an early summer day filled with patriotism, a traditional freedom fire, Swiss food, music and laughter. It will be a day like the 1st of August in any Swiss village. We will also, that day, welcome into our community the 18 year-olds as full citizens. Please mark Saturday, 14 November, in your calendars.

Switzerland remembers other important events this year. In 1415 the Confederates conquered Aargau, a key date not only for the citizens of that beautiful canton, but for all of us, because Aargau is the bridge between the eastern and the western parts of the country. Marignano in 1515 marks the bloodiest day in our entire history. On that terrible day, between seven and ten thousand young Swiss lost their lives in battle against the French and Venice. But out of that defeat came two good things. First, our ancestors understood that foreign

military adventures could not be the future of the nation and that it was better not to meddle anymore in the fights of the big powers. Only much later was the term "neutrality" used. And second, our Italian-speaking territories became Swiss. It should take another three hundred years until their inhabitants were full citizens. Who of us wants to imagine today the country without our "Confederati" from Ticino? And finally in 1815, after the bloody tracks that Napoleon had left across Europe, our "permanent and armed neutrality" was realized. It has kept us out of two terrible world wars and remains the solid base for the humanitarian activities of the world-wide Red Cross movement which uses the inverted Swiss flag as its emblem.

1315, 1415, 1515, 1815, certainly enough history for today, but let us just remember these things in order to be grateful for what we have inherited, both in Switzerland and in New Zealand: peace, democracy, political and human rights, prosperity, a long and healthy life our ancestors could not even dream of. Days of remembrance remind us to not take these good things for granted, that many other nations do not enjoy them and that we have to fight to preserve them, hopefully not with weapons anymore, but with our actions and voices.

I wish you all, citizens and friends, Swiss clubs and families, a great 1st of August.

Your Ambassador,
David Vogelsanger



The Rütli, cradle of our nation