

A word by the Ambassador on our Federal Day

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A word by the Ambassador on our Federal Day

Fellow citizens and friends of Switzerland

Once again, already for the third time, I have the privilege to address my wishes to you on the occasion of our national day. We call it Federal Day because we are a federation of 26 sovereign little republics. I do so on behalf of the Confederation whose citizens you are and on behalf of the team at the Embassy that works for you every day. May you enjoy the 726th birthday of our nation with your families and your clubs, wherever you are in New Zealand, or maybe exchanging the southern winter for a gorgeous Swiss summer back home. I will spend the day this time with the Swiss Club of Auckland on their farm, Jürg Bono with the Christchurch Club and Gloria Giugno with the Wellington Club. We all look forward to these events.



Hans Vetsch wrote in the last "Helvetia" that the Swiss Society he presides is enjoying the best relationship with the Embassy in forty years, that is since a first Swiss Ambassador took up residence in Wellington. We read that with much pleasure because it is exactly what the Embassy team strives for and it matches what we hear from many others. Let's keep it that way!

On 4 March, we came together, once again, to celebrate a big Swiss party at the Wellington Residence. The theme was not historic this time as in 2015 with "700 Years Morgarten Battle", but simply "Älplerchilbi". There were an unbelievable 700 happy people in our garden that day, even more as for Morgarten. They all had fun with the different music groups, the Swiss foods and wines, shooting and children's competitions, the beautiful St. Bernards, Bernese Mountain Dogs and our Bari, the only Great Swiss Mountain Dog in the country (however a thief...). One thing was historic, the very first Schwingen (Swiss wrestling) competition that ever took place in New Zealand's capital. We were lucky with the simply gorgeous weather. The following weekend was awful. I want to thank all of you who have contributed. The Embassy alone could not make such a big event happen.

And now a look to the future. Our Army has accepted my proposal to send one of its military bands to New Zealand around 1 August 2018. This is also a first in history! I am especially

pleased that the band members will all be accomplished musicians, but Army recruits, therefore ideally representing our militia-based defence system. We are at the beginning of the planning stage, but I can say already now that there will be close cooperation including common concerts with the New Zealand Defence Force and performances in Wellington, Auckland and probably also Taranaki. Our next national day will definitely be a special one.

Now, the Embassy does also other things besides organizing parties. This autumn, I have been busy with a joint project with the New Zealand Initiative. They brought forty chairmen and CEOs of some of the biggest NZ companies to our country. We made them meet with some of the brightest minds and most innovative projects and companies. These business leaders were all impressed by the way we do things, without the paralyzing centralism and bureaucracy they often encounter. We showed them our biggest infrastructure project in ages, the longest railway tunnel in the world through the Gotthard, completed within budget and a year early...

But frankly, the issue that has been foremost on my mind is a tedious one known to many of you: the deduction of AHV pensions from Superannuation. The Swiss Parliament will begin deliberations on the automatic exchange of banking information with a new group of forty

countries in September. If the proposal is accepted, both Switzerland and New Zealand will share information on each other's residents' accounts in the other country starting in 2019. I have been advocating waiting with New Zealand until a solution for the Superannuation problem has been found, maybe already after this year's NZ elections. But it is up to our Parliament to decide. If you are concerned, you must make your voices heard to Swiss MPs and political parties right now. After August, it will be too late.

In 2017, Switzerland remembers two important dates. Niklaus von Flüe, the patron saint of our Christian nation was born in Obwalden in 1417. Whether we are Catholic or Protestant, his wisdom has taught us to stay united and out of other countries' wars. 1517 marks the beginning of the Protestant Reform, even though it started in Switzerland only on the 1 January 1519 when Huldrych Zwingli pronounced his first sermon at Zurich's Grossmünster. Differences between the two confessions have marked Swiss history and led to several civil wars, but today our common Christian roots bind us together in, once again, very uncertain times.

With these thoughts I wish all of you, citizens and friends of Switzerland, your families and your clubs a beautiful 1st of August. May God bless both Switzerland and New Zealand!

Your Ambassador,
David Vogelsanger