

Ambassador's 1st August speech

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **78 (2012)**

Heft [7]

PDF erstellt am: **12.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-944082>

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Ambassador's 1st August Speech

Willkommen, bienvenu, benvenuto, allegra, welcome

Today, on 1 August 2012, we are celebrating Switzerland's 721st birthday. 721 years – and I, and not only I but most of my fellow Swiss citizen, still do not feel comfortable singing the Swiss national anthem. In London, the Olympics have just started. Have you ever watched Swiss athletes? They do terribly when singing the national anthem, very much contrary to Kiwis and most other nations. Why is it that my kids can easily sing the New Zealand national anthem, but not the Swiss one? Every time Switzerland's national day comes up, I wonder why that is and this year, I wanted to find out.

Our national anthem dates back to 1841. The Swiss psalm, as our national anthem is called since it was composed by a priest, took 140 years in the making. A national anthem should not be elected by government decree but by popular opinion, was the Swiss government's view. But what did that popular opinion want? The Swiss psalm was popular at the time, but so were other songs. Particularly one song, "Rufst Du mein Vaterland" (When my Fatherland calls) was equally popular and also often used for official political and military occasions at the time. But there was a catch: it was sung to the same melody as "God save the Queen"! Occasionally this led to quite embarrassing situations, particularly for a country like Switzerland that has never had a king or a queen.

As international contacts increased, the Swiss government really had to do something about it, and in 1961 it declared the "Swiss psalm" the provisional Swiss national anthem. In a direct democracy like Switzerland, in which the people are the sovereign, it was obvious that a referendum would be held on whether the Swiss wanted the Swiss psalm as national anthem. But there were mixed reactions, and it was decided that the test period for the Swiss psalm should be extended.

The Swiss psalm with its quite bombastic lines speaking about the red morning sky, the glowing of the Alps, God and the free Swiss failed to speak to the hearts of the "68 generation". Many Swiss asked for a more contemporary anthem. Paul Burkhard, a well-known and very popular Swiss composer, came up with a modern song. A song that calls for understanding between peoples, for peace, and for an open Switzerland which also offers the persecuted a home. But Burkhard's song, too, failed to strike a chord with the people, and in 1975 Switzerland still did not have a national anthem.

Other compositions for a new Swiss national anthem failed to win over the majority, too. In 1981 finally, the Swiss government set an end and declared the old-fashioned, 19th century Swiss psalm the country's national anthem.

In Swiss schools, the national anthem is generally not taught, and even on the occasion of the festivities of our national day it is often not sung. Given this history, it does not come as a surprise to me anymore why I and my fellow citizens are having a hard time singing our national anthem.

But I doubt that this has only to do with its old-fashioned wording. Swiss are naturally skeptical when it comes to too much expression of national pride. But mind you: this certainly has nothing to do with a lack of patriotism!

Paul Burkhard's national anthem, the one that was composed in the early seventies yet failed to become the Swiss national anthem, remains modern and contemporary to this day. In fact, Burkhard's wording for his national anthem reflects entirely the values and objectives as laid down in the Swiss Federal Constitution. And if we look at the Swiss foreign policy objectives as they are listed in our constitution:

- ◇ the alleviation of need and poverty in the world,
- ◇ the promotion of democracy,
- ◇ the respect for human rights,
- ◇ the peaceful co-existence of nations and
- ◇ the preservation of the environment,

then these Swiss foreign policy objectives as set out in the Swiss constitution are almost identical to the objectives as set out in Article 1 of the UN Charter.

So here we have a situation of a failed national anthem with a text that entirely reflects the objectives of the Swiss federal constitution, which are almost identical to the objectives of the United Nations – but a country that joined the UN only in 2002.

It is indeed this year, 2012, that Switzerland is celebrating its 10th anniversary as a member of the UN. As the only country in the world, we voted in a national referendum in favour of full membership. Switzerland had been a member of the League of Nations, but given the cold war and with 51 founding members, neutral Switzerland preferred to be an observer rather than a member of a not yet universal UN.

So this year we are celebrating our 10th anniversary. Switzerland is a small country, but a very strong partner, said UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon when celebrating our anniversary. He pointed out that Switzerland, for its size, plays a much larger role in the UN than one would expect. In fact, Geneva serves as the UN's second headquarters and many high-ranking UN posts are held or have been held by Swiss nationals. Ban Ki-Moon mentioned that this is quite remarkable for such a small country that has only joined the organization so recently. But it shows too, he said, just how dedicated and valued Switzerland is as a member.

And he went on mentioning particularly that in regard to the UN reform, and specifically to the reform of the UN Security Council, Switzerland has been recognized for its heavy involvement and outstanding contribution, and has fought hard to make the Security Council more effective, more transparent, and more democratic.

Switzerland and the UN share a further concern: to restrict the drift of further influence and decision-making power to groups of powerful states such as the G-8 or G-20.

(cont. page 8)

Swiss National Library seeks Helvetia Back-Issues

(cont.) Such groups can do well delivering the necessary momentum to overcome acute crises, but it is only the UN that can speak on behalf of all of the world's nations, and only the UN has the legitimacy to make decisions on behalf of all members.

Reform of the UN, reform of the Security Council, no further drain of decision-making power to groups of powerful nations – all of these issues are shared with just as much concern by New Zealand, likewise a small country and a long-standing dedicated member of the UN. New Zealand was one of our best allies in our efforts to push for reform of the working methods of the Security Council, and I would like to express our gratitude once more for New Zealand's commitment and support.

Climate change, hunger, water shortages, safeguarding energy supply, sustainable development – these are the major topics that the UN seeks to address. And to quote Ban Ki-Moon once more: all nations must lend a hand in addressing these challenges. Switzerland and New Zealand have taken up this challenge. Both countries make a disproportionately large contribution for their size, and will continue to do so in future.

Let me now propose a toast to Her Majesty Elizabeth the Second, Queen of New Zealand. To the Queen!

WANTED: Old issues of HELVETIA for the Swiss National Library

Between 1936 – 1991, the HELVETIA newsletter was sent regularly from New Zealand to the Swiss National Library in Bern.

The Swiss National Library collects publications relating to Switzerland from all over the world, so called *Helvetica*. This is why the Embassy wanted to pick up from where the HELVETIA stopped being sent and with great thanks to Marianne Drummond, Taranaki, most issues between 1991 – 2012 have been collected. However, there are some issues missing.

If you, Dear HELVETIA Reader, find any of the missing issues listed below, it would be greatly appreciated if you would be so kind as to send the issue(s) to the Embassy (PO Box 25004, Wellington 6146) by the end of November 2012. The Embassy will then forward the issue(s) to the Swiss National Library in Bern for posterity.

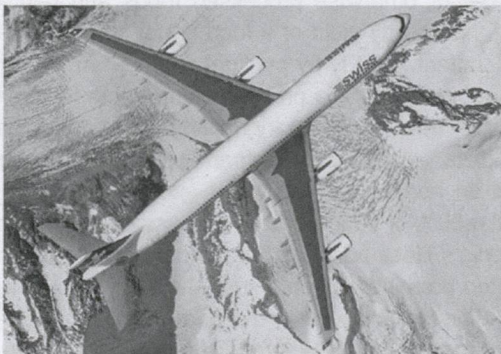
Thank you very much for your co-operation,

Marion Weichelt, Ambassador

The missing issues are:

1991 January 1991 February 1991 March 1991 June 1991 October 1991 November 1991	1992 January 1992 April 1992 May 1992 June 1992 July 1992 August 1992 September 1992 October 1992 November 1992 December 1992	1993 January 1993 February 1993 March 1993 May 1993 June 1993 July 1993 August 1993 September 1993 October 1993 December 1993	1994 January 1994 February 1994 March 1994 April 1994 May 1994 September 1994 October 1994 November 1994
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