

A word by the Ambassador on our Federal Day

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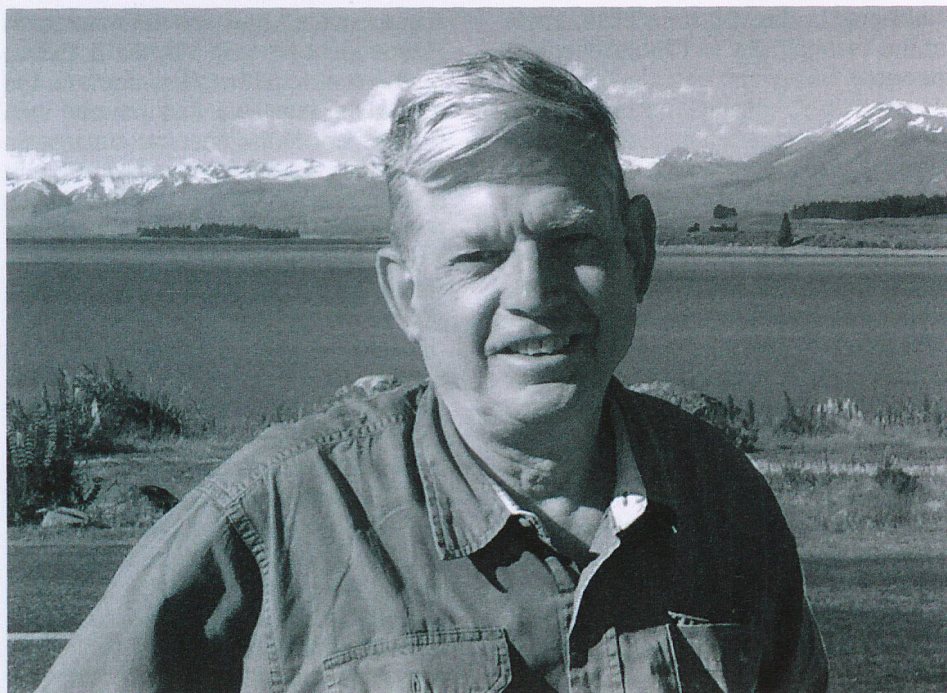
Dear fellow citizens and friends of Switzerland

Soon we will celebrate the 727th birthday of our Confederation. Our Ticino compatriots call this day "Natale della Patria", the Christmas of the country. I have always liked this beautiful expression. On this occasion, I feel privileged to address, for the fourth time, to all of you my heartfelt wishes, to you, to your families and to your clubs, wherever you may be in New Zealand or in the beautiful Swiss summer. I do this as the representative of our country in New Zealand, but also in the name of a great Embassy team and as a friend to many of you.

Out of a private visit by our then Chief of Defence Force, General André Blattmann, who stayed with us for a few days at the beginning of last year the beautiful project of a New Zealand tour by a formation of our Army Band was born. For the first time ever, Swiss uniforms will appear so far from home and in the country with the highest number per capita of Swiss citizens – worldwide, maybe with the exception of our little neighbour, the Principality of Liechtenstein. You will find the detailed program of the tour in Auckland, Taranaki and Wellington on the "Embassy News" page of this "Helvetia". The whole project has been developed in close cooperation with the New Zealand Defense Force and its Navy, Army and Air Force bands. The Swiss band will also perform in Australia and in India.

I am particularly fond of the fact that the sixteen musicians under the command of an experienced Swiss officer are all accomplished players, but young recruits still under basic training ("Rekrutenschule"). The tour is therefore also an excellent opportunity to show New Zealanders how our Citizens' Army benefits from skills acquired in civilian life for the defence of the country. In joint appearances with the New Zealand bands, the group will play both traditional Swiss and modern tunes. Please honour both our Army and the young musicians with your presence and bring your Kiwi friends along.

The highlight of the tour will be our Federal Day itself. We will celebrate it at our provisional home in Upper Hutt, the Swiss Residence in Lower Hutt being under complete renovation this year. The beautiful historic building that many of you know from the 2015 "Morgarten", the 2017 "Aelplerchilbi" and the 2018



Baar Folklore Group events has belonged to Switzerland since 1954. We now make it ready for the next sixty years of our country's presence in New Zealand. Due to the possibly harsh weather on a 1 August, the Embassy has not organized celebrations on that day in recent years, but 2018 will be different. We will not have our own band anytime soon again! There will be a heated tent, our friend and master chef Roland Schütz with his team will provide a magnificent "Berner Platte", there will be lampions for the children, a little side event for new young citizens and of course the traditional Freedom Fire.

As you know, Switzerland will begin automatic exchange of bank data with New Zealand at the beginning of next year. Our parliament finally accepted this last December, despite strong hesitations and a first resounding no by the National Council that has been well heard in Wellington. Only Saudi Arabia and New Zealand out of 41 countries were contested, the latter for one reason only, the deduction of honestly earned Swiss AHV pensions from Superannuation. I can say that no other issue has kept me as busy as this one since I arrived here in September 2014. Switzerland has never accepted and will not accept this policy. It is unjustified and unfair. I have worked on this issue with Peter Ehrler, your representative on the Council of the Swiss Abroad, Hans Vetsch, president of the Swiss Society, and Peter Deutschle, our Consul in Auckland, and we will continue to do so. Our parliament has tasked the Federal

Council and the Embassy to continue to try to find a solution with New Zealand.

Five members of our Council of States came to New Zealand at the beginning of April. No Swiss parliamentary visit of this caliber has ever come here, the country farthest from ours. The five MPs have represented all four of our governing parties. One of the central purposes of the visit was to drive the point home that Switzerland expects from New Zealand a fair solution of the deduction issue. We had meetings with Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters, Speaker Trevor Mallard and a number of other members of the House of Representatives. All parties in the NZ Parliament are on record saying that a solution should be found. We expect them now to finally produce it. It is of course not only Swiss citizens who are victims of the deduction policy, but also those of a good number of other nations, among them the close allies of New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the United States, as well as more and more returning New Zealanders who have worked abroad. I am confident that eventually a solution will be found because New Zealand stands alone in the world with this policy. Stay tuned and let your views as a NZ voter be known to your local MP.

I wish you all a beautiful 1st of August and hope to see you at one of the events with our Army Band. May God continue to bless both Switzerland and New Zealand!

Your Ambassador,
David Vogelsanger