



**Referat von Alec von Graffenried, Stadtpräsident von Bern, anlässlich des  
1.-August-Empfangs im Erlacherhof, 01.08.2017 ©**

(Es gilt das gesprochene Wort)

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren

Mesdames, Messieurs

Honorable guests

Herzlich willkommen zur Bundesfeier im Erlacherhof, je vous souhaite une très cordiale bienvenue ici à L'Erlacherhof pour cette soirée de la fête nationale. Aujourd'hui c'est la soirée des « Aaaah et des Ohhhh ». Aaaah, dès que le feu d'artifice commence et Ooooh, lorsqu'il est fini. Pourquoi ces feux d'artifices? Peut-être parce que mieux qu'avec des mots ou avec des chants nous Suisses pouvons exprimer notre joie et notre attachement à la Suisse avec la pyrotechnique.

Many of you come from abroad, so for some it may be the very first National Holiday you experience in Switzerland. So let me ask you, does anyone have an idea, for how many years we have been celebrating this 1<sup>st</sup> of August National Holiday?

Well, one would say since 1291, when the «Swiss Confederation» was founded by the three cantons Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden at the Rütliwiese. Well, I have to tell you, this is not the case. Another guess would be since 1848, the year when our modern federal state was established.

No, this is not true either. The «Swiss Confederation» was established on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 1848 and this has nothing to do with the 1<sup>st</sup> of August.

Switzerland celebrated the 1<sup>st</sup> of August for the very first time in 1891, which means 600 years after 1291. The Bundesrat, however, was not keen on too much partying and did not intend to make it an annual celebration. Originally, they wanted to celebrate a national holiday only every 100 years. However, the Swiss abroad made pressure. The international community of the Swiss abroad envied the French for their «quatorze juillet» or the Americans for their «4th of July», so the Bundesrat reconsidered the situation. In 1899, the Bundesrat ordered the church bells to ring in the evening of the 1<sup>st</sup> of August all over Switzerland. The 1<sup>st</sup> of August Holiday therefore is a 118-year-old tradition. However, it has been only 23 years since the 1<sup>st</sup> of August has also become a work-free holiday, thanks to an initiative of a Swiss Nationalist Party, die «Nationale Aktion». This party had its biggest success with the initiative for a work-free 1<sup>st</sup> of August holiday – and vanished shortly afterwards.

Maybe you ask yourself, what keeps Switzerland together?

- It is not the language; we speak 3 to 4 languages. For instance, we speak German in the famous Swiss city called Lucerne, French in Lausanne and Italian in Lugano.
- Is it the common culture that keeps Switzerland together? No, it is not. Switzerland is a melting pot of many cultures.
- It is not the religion either; our religious differences lead the Swiss to many civil wars over the centuries. However, what could it be then?
- Could it possibly be the Swiss chocolate? We eat an average of 10 kilos of chocolate per capita per year. About twice as much as North Americans do.
- Or is it the Swiss Railway system, the Swiss Post or the Swiss Radio- and Television Network?

All very good explanations, but nothing that would hold together a country and a society with 4 languages and with 25% foreigners, migrants, expats and refugees.

What really holds Switzerland together is the belief that we are stronger together than alone and that together we are simply able to achieve more. It is our conviction that despite of all the cultural, religious and linguistic differences, we do share the same core values.

That we feel obliged to freedom, to the rule of law, to the human rights and to a society of education. In addition, it is our strong and decisive will to respect the minorities in our country.

In his famous speech in honour of Czech President Vaclav Havel, the famous Bernese writer Friedrich Dürrenmatt said in 1990:

«What the individual not only may demand but also must demand from the state are the human rights, daily bread for everyone, equality before the law, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, transparency, the abolition of torture, etc. These should be matters of course; signs of dignity, fundamental rights which allow the individual coexistence in peace with the other individuals. »

As you may know, modern Switzerland was founded in 1848. The Protestants and the big cities, the Liberals with General Henry Dufour won Switzerland's last civil war in a row of many civil wars during the centuries. The Liberals, the Protestants and the big cities won the civil war against the Catholics, against the cantons in Central Switzerland, against the Conservatives. There was a huge discord between Liberals and Conservatives in the 19th century in Switzerland. After 1848, Switzerland had to work long and hard on reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics, Liberals and Conservatives. That is why in the 1890ies Switzerland made the 1<sup>st</sup> of August its National Holiday. The 1<sup>st</sup> of August refers to William Tell and the war of the three Cantons against Habsburg, Austria. This is the myth of the Conservatives, not of the Liberals. 1291 is a common myth. In 1291, there were no Catholics and Protestants. Therefore, by making the 1<sup>st</sup> of August our national holiday, Switzerland tried to reconcile the war opponents of 1848. That is why we celebrate the 1<sup>st</sup> of August. Moreover, this shows how we try to settle conflicts in Switzerland. We try to respect minorities, we try to approach opponents and we try to work together, for the better of the whole country.

Let us now sing together or listen together to the National Anthem of Switzerland. Many countries have a special relationship to something like a National Anthem. So do the Swiss. For a very long time we had two concurring versions of a National Anthem. The nicer one had the same melody as the English anthem «God save the Queen». «Rufst du mein Vaterland» was not very convenient. Therefore we chose the current version of our Anthem only in 1981. Still many Swiss feel uncomfortable with our Anthem, because of the somehow awkward lyrics.

In 2014, we tried something new. We tried to find new lyrics for our National Anthem. Werner Widmer integrated the Swiss values out of the Swiss Constitution into new lyrics. We shall all sing this new text now.

Weisses Kreuz auf rotem Grund,  
unser Zeichen für den Bund:  
Freiheit, Unabhängigkeit, Frieden.  
Offen für die Welt, in der wir leben,  
woll'n wir nach Gerechtigkeit streben.  
Frei, wer seine Freiheit nützt,  
stark ein Volk, das Schwache stützt.  
Weisses Kreuz auf rotem Grund,  
singen wir vereint aus einem Mund.

Unser besonderer Dank geht an alle Sponsoren, ohne Sie wäre der heutige Tag nicht möglich. A big thank you to all our sponsors – this event would not be possible without your support.

Please enjoy the rest of the evening and don't miss the fireworks at 10.15 pm. Bitte geniessen Sie nun den Abend – nächster Termin ist um 22.15 Uhr, wenn es auf dem Gurten mit dem Feuerwerk losgeht. Ich wünsche Ihnen viel Vergnügen und einen schönen Abend.