

Reception on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th anniversary  
of Switzerland joining the Council of Europe

Wednesday 24 April 2013

Dear Mr. President of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Dear fellow parliamentarians,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fifty years have passed since Switzerland has joined the Council of Europe. 50 years do not seem to be very impressive if you compare to the founding members of the Council of Europe, which celebrate already 64 years of membership.

It is however a remarkably long period of time if you consider the special character of my country, Switzerland, when it comes to joining international organizations.

As you may know, Switzerland has never joined the European Union. It was very reluctant to become a full member of the United Nations. Only in 2002 Switzerland finally joined the United Nations as its 190<sup>th</sup> member.

Swiss people are very fond of their independence and they are afraid of putting at risk their traditional policy of neutrality. If you look at it from this perspective then you may understand that our political predecessors in the Swiss parliament took a rather early and quite courageous decision in 1963 when they decided to join the Council of Europe as its 17<sup>th</sup> member.

50 years, by the way, is indeed a good age, as I know from my own experience, having crossed this threshold myself very recently.

It is probably true that Swiss people are overly cautious and a bit hesitant when confronted with the question of joining an international organization. But it is true as well that they are very loyal, dedicated and active members once they have joined an international body.

That is precisely what we want to do as well as member of the Council of Europe.

Let me admit in this context, that I feel proud as Speaker of the National Council to know, that the Swiss delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly is usually among the top ranking delegations in the statistic about participation in the meetings of the Parliamentary Assembly. Obviously I know that it is not only about physical presence, but active engagement – I do like to thank the Swiss Delegation for its important work - I feel pretty proudly about it.

Dear colleagues, as we all know Europe is going through difficult times, in economic as well as in political terms. All the more it does need a strong Council of Europe as an organization which stands for common values, for coordination, for cooperation and for solidarity among its equal members. An organization which defends human rights, democracy and the rule of law: fundamental values dear to us in Switzerland and dear to all of you as well.

Thank you for your attention. Enjoy the evening, the Swiss food and wine - and the music from Switzerland. All the best to everyone!