

Direct democracy means direct responsibility

National Day 2015 on the Rütli meadow

Official speech by the President of the Confederation, Simonetta Sommaruga

Dear fellow citizens, ladies and gentlemen,

When I was invited to participate to this feast of August 1 on the Rütli meadow, the organizers told me I could bring a guest with me, and I was absolutely free to choose that person, without restriction. The idea appealed to me and that's how I am with you today on the Rütli meadow.

A few months later, I wondered whom I could invite : a Nobel Peace Prize winner, a head of government or the youngest president of a town in Switzerland? To demonstrate the hospitality of Switzerland, I could invite a representative of a neighboring country.

The President of the French Republic, however, has already come to Switzerland this year, President Merkel will come in September.

As for Matteo Renzi, it is difficult for him to be away before the big Ferragosto break.

I have also thought about the European Juncker who could represent all our neighbors. But just imagine, after the Rütli Oath a Rütli Kiss? No, this is not thinkable.

I then remembered an invitation I had myself received this spring, and I would like to read a few lines:

"Madam President of the Confederation, my friend Nadine Wüthrich and myself, Debora Ticli, are at the ninth class of the Kreuzfeld school in Langenthal. We wish to invite you as a person who, in her profession, is committed very much to others. Your visit would be treated confidentially and the media would be unaware." That seemed interesting, and the last sentence of the letter finally convinced me: "The school would cover your travel expenses."

A few weeks later, I made my way to Langenthal where I was warmly welcomed. The students asked me questions on energy policy, on foreign naturalization procedures and the future of our relations with Europe.

As they were all 16 years old, I told them that when they could vote in two years, it probably would be precisely on these issues that they would have to take a decision.

Should Switzerland target on renewable energy rather than on nuclear energy?

Should we facilitate naturalization for third generation foreigners?

How do we deal the relations between Switzerland and the EU?

I believe that many of these young people became aware that in a direct democracy their opinion counts.

I often think with pleasure at the discussions I had with these girls and boys who were very interested in the world in which they live and in which they will soon participate in decisions concerning the future of our country. I also learnt a lot in this meeting.

That's why Debora Ticli is now my guest. And her friend Nadine Wüthrich is also with us today on the Rütli meadow.

Debora is my guest because at the age of 16 she already lives what is the essence of our direct democracy: she is very interested in political issues, she builds up an opinion, she opens the debate and defends her view. Debora wants to participate in decisions that affect our future and transform our country. In other words, she is ready to assume her responsibilities as a citizen.

Dear fellow citizens, in the coming years we have to take decisive political decisions for our future.

What exactly are we doing to fight against global warming?

How do we ensure sustainability of the AVS and other social insurances?

How do we resolve our relations with our largest trading partner, Europe, in order to create stable and secure relations and in order to put an end to the current uncertainty?

When we speak of Europe, there is one thing we must never forget.

The peace that has surrounded our country for 70 years now does not happen by itself. Central Europe has never before experienced such a long period without war.

This means that we do not defend our freedom and our prosperity against Europe, but that the development we experienced was only possible in the context of a Europe at peace.

We will always need a healthy economy - and therefore good relations with our neighbors - for it is only in these conditions that Switzerland can achieve major reform projects that lie ahead in the coming years.

It is also necessary that our countries practice a political culture oriented to solutions.

The Federal Council must regularly find a common ground and demonstrate its readiness to consistency. Parliament must constantly seek compromises.

The compromise is the result of a hard political work. In direct democracy, it is also, above all, a sign of strength, not of weakness.

Our direct democracy can only function if we share a political culture supported by a large majority.

The only principle that can guide this political culture is that of liability: direct democracy means direct responsibility.

Acting responsibly means knowing that a popular initiative must not be diverted from its purpose to give a political signal. A popular initiative aims to change our Federal Constitution. And our Constitution, the fundamental text of our democracy, cannot be reduced to the level of a mere collection of political signals.

Acting responsibly also means, when taking a political decision, think of the minorities in our country, all those and all those who cannot, or not yet cast their ballots.

Acting responsibly, well, it's also think that Switzerland is not an island but a united country, with links to the world.

Dear fellow citizens, take care of our direct democracy and pass on to younger generations the human values and political culture that are necessary for the proper functioning of our unique political system.

I am delighted that today is my guest Debora. Debora wants to assume her responsibilities as a citizen and participate in decisions about our country. She represents, along with thousands of other young people, the future of Switzerland.

Do not look to the future with fear. What motivates and develops our country is openness, courage and confidence.

Dear fellow citizens, I have the joy and honor to transmit to you my greetings and best WISHES of the federal government.