

Speech by Federal President Simonetta Sommaruga to Swiss nationals abroad on the occasion of the 2020 Swiss National Day on 1 August

Dear Swiss nationals abroad

Today I am at Eichholz, a popular camping and leisure park on the Aare River in Bern.

When the weather is fine, people flock here to barbeque or bathe in the river. Children and dogs race around bathing towels; occasionally a Frisbee may land on someone's book.

Against this backdrop you might think that visitors to Eichholz would be permanently arguing. But they are not; they get along with each other because they recognise that people have different interests, and when problems arise it is best to talk to each other.

At Eichholz, visitors experience on a small scale what we on a large scale call 'democracy'.

Dear Swiss nationals abroad

Not all of you live in countries with democratic structures. But, in the country you call home, each of you represents Switzerland and its democratic values.

These values are not given: they must be defended, time and again. To do this, people must trust each other to be able to engage in and manage disputes.

Trust in one another does not simply develop in a vacuum. It requires an environment that protects the freedom and co-determination of the population.

- It requires a parliament that reflects all the forces in the country.
- It requires a government that must earn people's trust, day after day.
- It requires an independent judiciary.

And:

It requires strong media. Media that are independent, that pay close attention to what is going on, and that can criticise those in power.

Independent media allow everyone the chance to be heard and to have his or her say.

Independent media provide citizens with the information they require to form their own opinion. And, independent media say what others would prefer not to say. That is why they are an inherent part of every democracy.

Dear Swiss nationals abroad

You convey Switzerland's democratic principles to the world. Every encounter with you in your new homeland is a reminder that peaceful co-existence in freedom, in co-determination is possible.

I thank you most sincerely for being good ambassadors for Switzerland and wish you on behalf of the Federal Council a happy first of August in your adopted homeland.