



**Address by Mr. Moritz de Hadeln
President of the Municipal Council of Gland
on the occasion of the National Day, August 1st, 2013**

English translation

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends,

A National Day is always an opportunity to reflect on the past. Faced with a rapidly changing world, some are tempted to forge ahead, others to take refuge in the values of the past. But can we summarize our past in a few minutes? Let me attempt this challenge.

It was not until 1899 that the Federal government decided to make this day our National Day after having declared the 1291 Chart between the mountain communities of Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden to be the founder document of the Confederation. Everything seemed so simple then.

But with the work of contemporary historians certainties fade. Great stories of heroism become legends. History has never been an exact science, but subject to manipulation and interpretation. We do not even know for sure if William Tell was Swiss or Danish or if Winkelried really existed. As for the Grütli oath, it is most likely - we are told - only a legend.

The Chart of 1291, written in Latin - surprisingly for mountaineers - was found by chance in an archive in 1758. If you look at it closely, it was in reality not a declaration of independence but essentially an act of solidarity between three communities wishing to protect the road of the St. Gotthard. It echoes the "Patto di Torre" already signed in 1182, between the communities of Val Blenio and Leventina south of the Gotthard. Already in those days, one of the major concerns was to ensure the transit between the North and the South. These were the times of Marco Polo's travels to the East, when Venice, Florence and Bruges were at the height of their greatness.

The unity of our country required nearly 600 years, marked with wars of liberation and internal struggles between cantons. The three original cantons, were quickly joined by those of Lucerne and Zurich, and later Berne. It was essentially a Germanic alliance whose battles were named Morgarten, Sempach, Zürich later Grandson, Morat ... or the defeat of Marignan, where some 10,000 Swiss lost their lives. It was not until the nineteenth century that our Latin cantons joined the Confederation. As for our canton, the first to give women the right to vote, it was occupied for centuries by the Bernese.

And then there were the four wars of religion. If we are surprised that Shiites and Sunnis are killing each other in the Middle East, we forget that our Catholic and Protestant cantons have waged war with each other in the name of the same God. If we criticize the excesses of moral rigour of some Muslim communities, prohibiting in the name of the Koran dancing halls or movie theatres, we forget that all theatres were banned in Geneva and Zurich for nearly 250 years, in the name of the Bible.

Not content to fight for the independence of their land, the Swiss went to war as mercenaries on behalf of foreign potentates. Many never returned home. In Paris, 35 Swiss guards were killed defending the Bastille on July 14, 1789. They were obviously on the wrong side of history. It was not until 1848 that this foreign service was abolished and the country became neutral.

Today, the remaining memories of those days are some great marches for our military brass bands and the Swiss Guards of the Vatican. One finds no Swiss soldiers abroad, except as observers or in peacekeeping missions for the UN. They are in Kosova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the border between the two Korea, the Middle East, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan or Syria ... and mostly unarmed.

An overview of our history would be incomplete without mentioning our social conflicts. Difficult to ignore the general strikes of 1918 and especially of 1932 when 13 workers were killed by the army in Geneva.

The fact remains that our national unity is a miracle. Unique in Europe, solidarity between our four different cultures and languages was far from obvious. The secret of this miracle is the acceptance that all are equal and free in front of the Law, and that consensus is the only way out of a heated debate between opponents. Our democracy, however imperfect, remains a model envied by many countries. But to get there, generations had to pay the price for it.

Dictated by its geography, Switzerland was historically a place of transit and hospitality. Many travellers have enriched our cultural heritage and our society. Today a haven of peace, our land has opened to a multi-cultural society that is part of our daily lives.

The fact remains that the future of our country is fragile. No more wars, internal disputes, prejudice, but there remains still a long way to go and tough decisions to be made: Do we want more Europe or less Europe and do we really have that choice, do we want more concrete on our mountains and valleys or do we want to protect our nature, do we want to continue to live as unconscious consumers or be more aware of the limits of our resources, are we happy to eat vegetables with pesticides or do we want a more healthier food, will we close our doors to foreigners or welcome them more generously .

No one really knows what our future will look like, but it is largely in our hands.

As our brave mountaineers in 1291 had neither the internet nor the telephone, the legend tells us they gave the alarm by lighting a fire on the mountain tops. This tradition has been preserved to this day in sign of interdependence and solidarity. It is around these fires, no doubt, that we can find the deep sense of our unity!