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### **On the Road to a Community of Federalist States**

Federalism is a living idea!

Federalism is a reality!

Federalism is in flux!

The four days of this conference on federalism have made this very clear. I am delighted to be taking part in this final session with you today.

“Learning from Each Other through Dialogue”: the subtitle of this conference perfectly sums up what has been achieved in the work sessions over the last three days, and what we have heard from the three work session speakers in the plenary session.

“Learning from Each Other through Dialogue”: I am convinced that the opportunity to share your own experiences with others will also have deepened your understanding of your own situation, of your own country. In meeting others, in comparing notes with them, in discussing matters with them, we come to sense our own identity more acutely. This conference has been conducted in a spirit of mutual respect, trust and openness. And that framework has made it possible for us to conduct a dialogue that extended far beyond an academic exchange.

What does federalism mean to me? I suppose you must all have asked yourselves this question. For me it is also a question of everyday experience. I live federalism in one form or another every single day, because the work done by my department involves a vast number of interfaces with the cantons and requires intensive cooperation between them and the federation. This is why I am especially pleased that Luigi Pedrazzini, President of the Conference of Cantons and in particular a representative of Ticino, is chairing today's panel.

One example of an interface with the cantons in my department is internal security, where the cantons take precedence in police matters. Another is migration, where functions are shared between the cantons and the federation. We can also see federalism in the composition of the government. In Switzerland we have an all-party government in which the various areas and language regions of the country are represented. I have personal experience at both levels: as a member of the government of the smallest canton, and now in the national government. Every one of you who is or has been active at different levels has cause to know that the opportunities and limitations of federalism can be assessed differently, depending on your point of view.

But ultimately the most crucial aspect of federalism is proximity to the people, in other words the closeness of government and administrative bodies to the citizen. This closeness ensures that we govern for the citizen. But we must not allow it to prevent us from acknowledging federal supremacy in complex matters such as foreign policy. Foreign policy must be conducted under

federal leadership, but this does not mean that the cantons must be excluded from it.

I should like to sum up the findings of the conference in six fundamental maxims.

### **1. The federalist idea has a clear nucleus.**

Combining unity and diversity is clearly the core element of federalism.

Diversity is often seen as an obstacle to unity, as something that simply has to be put up with. On the contrary: in the diversity of the world lies enormous wealth, which we must maintain and foster. Federalist states have found their own response to this challenge and to this tense relationship: they have adopted a multilevel structure.

### **2. The federalist idea is implemented with great openness**

This conference has confirmed that federalist states have all found their own ways of combining unity and diversity. There are as many different ways of implementing the federalist idea as there are states. We often hear it said that federalism “differs from country to country”, which reminds me of the answer that we Swiss often give when we are asked how we do something or other in Switzerland. The answer is often: “It varies from canton to canton!”

This conference has also shown that supra-national organisations like the European Union (EU) incorporate federalist elements. Both supra-national organisations and member states (in their relationship to the local level) can be shaped by federalist ideas.

### **3. Federalism has a future**

Globalisation on one hand, local and regional autonomy on the other: both these factors have given federalism a strong tailwind in recent years and decades. For a very long time states organised on federal lines – like Switzerland – have been asking themselves whether each of the levels still has sufficient autonomy and freedom of action, and have been trying to revitalise federalism. Various states with a centralist tradition have set off on the road towards federation. States that were born out of political turmoil – like South Africa, for example – have adopted de facto federative structures, and newly emerging – or newly re-emerging – states like East Timor and Somalia are beginning to take an interest in it. Numerous emerging and developing countries that were dominated by centralist ideas during the Cold War are discovering the relevance of federalism, partly under the supportive influence of national and multilateral development organisations.

One major reason for the relevance of federalism was highlighted during discussion of the second topic: “Decentralised state structures and conflict prevention”. In more and more cases of ethnic conflict, federalist solutions are being sought – as we heard this morning from Mrs Nafis Safik. I am convinced that federalist structures are one way of avoiding fragmentation in such cases. Federalism thus has an eminently important role to play in conflict prevention and the preservation of peace, both now and in the future.

### **4. Federalism isn't a magic formula**

The accelerating spread of federative states and the growing strength of the federalist idea must not, of course, lead us to see the world through rose-

tinted spectacles and sit back and relax. In federative states there is a recurrent danger of centralisation: the more complex the functions of a state, the stronger the tendency towards centralisation. The problem of minorities is a further threat: even federative states with a long history to look back on are familiar with persistent minority problems, some of them actually entailing the threat of secession. At first glance it often appears that greater regional autonomy can actually whet the appetite for independence. In countries where the nation-building process is not yet complete, the question arises as to how the aspiration for autonomy can be meaningfully reconciled with the equally legitimate desire for unity.

## **5. Federalism means responsibility at all levels**

For many a politician calling for more independence, decentralisation and hence autonomy for his or her region is the be-all and end-all. But that step is often merely the starting point. For the member states, responsibility in federalism means that when times are hard they must look to their own obligations, not run to the federation for support at the first sign of a draft.

Cooperation and responsibility in federalism mean respecting the system, not blurring responsibilities by constantly playing “pass the parcel”.

But responsibility also means trusting in the member states to meet their responsibilities in full.

Federalism needs responsibility. Without responsibility, federalism is a contradiction in itself. Responsibility for the interests of one's own regional

authority is important, but it must not be allowed to dissipate in the blinkered pursuit of one's own interests.

If federalism is to succeed, there must be a desire for dialogue and cooperation – both between the central state and the member states and between one member state and another. And there must be a readiness for solidarity: solidarity of the richer member states with the poorer, solidarity of the central state with member states under heavy financial pressure, sometimes even solidarity of the member states with the central state. That is how federalism will continue to gain ground as an organising principle for the global community. Dialogue about experiences, developments and future fields of action will thus become more and more important in the future.

## **6. The renewal of federalism**

In the renewal of federalism or the discussion about centralising certain functions, finance is a significant factor – if not the major driving force! Federalism must constantly renew itself, but it must also constantly justify itself. A concept of oneself is not enough on its own to meet new challenges. In our everyday work as politicians we constantly come up against the limits of federalism.

As convinced federalists we tend to focus principally on the opportunities and development possibilities that it offers. We could have done just that at this conference. But the important thing is that we know the limits. Exploring these more closely should be one of the challenges faced by subsequent conferences.

Finally, on behalf of the sponsors of this conference, the Federal Council and the cantonal governments, thank you for your active participation in this dialogue on the future of federalism.

I should like to thank everybody concerned – particularly Arnold Koller, former Federal Councillor and President of the Organising Committee. As a member of the Swiss government I am proud that Arnold Koller – my predecessor in my present office – has given us the benefit of his vast experience, thus contributing decisively to the success of the event.

My special thanks are due to the students of St Gallen University, whose contribution to the success of this conference has been immense.

I fervently hope that the city of St Gallen, and with it the Lake Constance region that borders three federal states, will leave everyone who has taken part in the conference with the happiest of memories.

This country sees it as an obligation to continue to pass on its abilities and experience. The Federal Council thus regards closer international cooperation in the field of federalism as most important and will continue to pursue it by every means at its disposal. I am convinced that the International Conference on Federalism 2002 in St Gallen has given further impetus to the idea of partnership among federative states!