



## Speech Lars Seier Christensen

Mr Ambassador, Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen!

It is a great pleasure to be here today, and to participate in celebrating the Swiss national day, and celebrating Switzerland. Switzerland and the Swiss, a country and a people that has welcomed our family and thousands of other Danes and treated us kindly, politely and with generosity and respect. I am honoured that you have asked me to give this speech today and I think it is a wonderful opportunity to say thank you to Switzerland, and I am sure I speak on behalf of all Danes living in your country today in presenting this heartfelt thank you.

Six years ago, my wife and I moved into our lovely house in Switzerland. As we are a half British, half Danish family this is not the first time we have lived abroad. Personally, I have lived in Spain, Britain and Germany, each place for a number of years. So after fifteen years in Denmark, we felt it was time for us, and not least our kids, to try to another country as our home again.

My wife and I, We like freedom, and we like that things work. We like a society that has a fair balance between the private sphere, respect for its citizens and a well functioning infrastructure and public service. We like nature and the beautiful countryside. We like charming villages and cities with history and lots of good restaurants and options for entertainment. Of course, with our five daughters, good shopping is also of the utmost importance! We like cleanliness and orderliness. We like the European style of life. That is NOT, just to be clear, a European Union style of life, my reservations towards the union is perhaps known by some of you. So being outside of the EU would inevitably be seen as a plus, although not a must.

And when you add all those requirements and desires up, Switzerland was the obvious choice. Your country, Mr Ambassador, has all that and much more. Add to that Switzerland's central geographical location, meaning that we are within driving distance of many wonderful places.

And I am happy to say that we have never once regretted that move. In fact, among the many Danish ex-pats living in Switzerland, I cannot recall ever meeting anyone that truly regretted their move to Switzerland.

We immediately got an impression of how welcoming Switzerland can be. On the second day after we arrived in a village in the canton of Skt Gallen, Jonchwil - a small village that prides itself on the many businesses and jobs it has created, - on the second day, we had an unexpected visit. A gentleman rang our doorbell and presented a bouquet of flowers to my wife. I thought this was really nice of what I assumed was one of our new neighbours. But in fact it turned out be the Mayor of Jonschwil, showing us the kindness and respect of paying us a visit immediately and welcoming us to the local society. He also said that if he could do anything to help, we should let him know.

This turned out to be an unwise offer to make, because all my daughters immediately started asking lots and lots of questions about sportsclubs, public services and many other things. Half an hour later, the poor guy was still frantically taking notes of all the questions. But in spite of the avalanche of enquiries that my girls put to him, what happened? A few days later, a three page letter arrived from the Mayor personally setting out names and contact details of the leaders of all the many activities requested. This service, this respect for your citizens is typical of Swiss elected leaders, and it made a great first impression on me. So much that the mayor is now one of our good friends. I have introduced him to Danish christmas lunch and the dubious habit of schnaps drinking, something we Danes excel in!

The Swiss are practical and discrete people that dont mess unnecessarily in their neighbours affairs or are intrusive or overly curious about stuff that are none of their business. But they do like to DO business, though.

An immediate example of that was in fact our nearest neighbour that is a flower shop. Just after we left for Switzerland, some of the Danish media was very interest-



ed in my reasons for the move, with me being an outspoken proponent for lower taxes in Denmark and all that. About lower taxes, I had to conclude, As they say, "if the mountain wont come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain". But thats another story.

The Danish tabloid, EkstraBladet, was so interested that they sent a video journalist to Schwarzenbach as my part of the Gemeinde is called. I had left for the Tour de France as always in July so I wasnt around. The journalist went around the village with a printed picture of the family to try locate us, and finally got to the flower shop next door. I still remember the video where the journalist asks something like this to the flower shop assistant: "There is a rich Danish guy that has just moved to the village, do you know him?" And the girl answers, with the usual Swiss matter-of-factness and business acumen: "No, I have never seen him, but if he lives nearby and is very rich, I sure hope he likes flowers!"

Switzerland and Denmark are alike in many ways, and we should work much closer together, in my view. We are both small countries, nearly the same size. There is a few more of you Swiss guys than us, but we have populations that are small enough to still have accountability and social coherence. You have a few more mountains than us, but you know what? -,we have more beaches than you. You have more cows than us - or at least they make a lot more noise than ours with all their bells! We have more bikes than you - but then again, who needs bikes when the car tax including VAT is 11 percent? We both have a healthy mistrust of the EU, we both like being ourselves and celebrating our nation states and our history and uniqueness. Even our flags look nearly identical.

And I do hate to tell you this, but The Ambassador asked me for a Viking perspective - the myth of your national hero, Vilhelm Tell and the apple on his son's head, is very likely inspired by a story written four hundred years earlier by the first known Danish historian and writer, Saxo Grammaticus, who coincidentally, we names Saxo Bank after. Saxo described the identical story of Palnatoke in his great 12th century chronicle about the Vikings and their history. So even our heroes we share.

You have more banks than us, but at least I personally am not to blame for that, I did what I could for Denmark to catch up.

Unfortunately, many Danes have a twisted view of Switzerland, a view that somehow the country has something to do only with banks. That the country is all about dubious low taxes and that there is little else in the country but rich foreigners running away as tax refugees from

their home countries and doing nothing productive. And how can there possibly be schools and hospitals, and that holy grail welfare - how can there be WELFARE in a country that does not tax its people so hard that they have tears in their eyes? Well, to be honest, I know a few Swiss, too, that have tears in their eyes, but they really dont know how good they have it!

The amazing thing is - if you are respectful and careful about your taxpayer's money, you can go a long way without taking half of your citizens income or more. Just consider - The Swiss live longer than Danes, they have better hospitals and are better educated, there are certainly no beggars in streets and in general, the public services are far more efficient and the infrastructure and public transport works far better. You Swiss are richer and have far greater savings than the average Dane. I am not saying this to knock Denmark, my country that I love, but just in the hope that one day, we can get inspired by the Swiss to do as well as you.

The fact is, Switzerland is not all about banks although some of the greatest banks in the world are from your country. But so is the worlds largest commodities firm(-Glencore), the worlds largest recruitment firm (Adecco), the worlds largest engineering firm (ABB), the worlds largest and also the third largest pharmaceutical companies (Novartis, Hoffman La Roche), the worlds second largest reinsurance company (Swiss Re), the worlds largest food company (Nestle), the worlds second largest luxury good company (Richemont), the worlds largest watch company (Swatch) and the worlds second largest insurance company (Zurich).

A third of all commodity trading in world goes through Switzerland, a fourth of the world's investment capital is managed in Switzerland..... And you know what, you are pretty smart, too.

In numbers of patents taken out, the Swiss are the third most prolific per capita, and when it comes to Nobel prize winners, you are second per capita in the world.

But of course, Switzerland think only about money and business and have no international sense of responsibility then? Well, the country takes about three times as many refugees as Denmark, just to mention one statistic. Your country already has more first and second generation immigrants, most of them well integrated, more than we expect - and fear - to have HALF of by 2050. This just go to show that if you are wise about who you allow and how you integrate them, immigrations adds value rather than create problems.



In general, having rules and laws, albeit not too many, is part of Swiss mentality. You have approximately a quarter of the number of laws that we have in Denmark, but the ones you have, you want upheld. Driving too fast on the roads is a very bad idea, and gets punished severely. Using the bathroom after 10 pm in certain housing estates is frowned upon and late night noise is not popular.

However, At my wife's round birthday last year, we knew that we would be noisy after normal Swiss village bedtime. But we also know that most Swiss will accept a good deal, so we gave every household around us a voucher for a local restaurant meal in return for a bit of noise. Everyone gladly accepted. So the band - Earth, Wind and Fire that we had flown in from America - went on stage after midnight as planned and made a fair amount of noise, to be honest, but we had made the necessary arrangements. Or so we thought.

But half an hour into the performance, the police nevertheless arrived. We explained that we were disappointed, because we had taken the time to go around the village and explain to everyone and even paid them off with a meal. Well, said the police, they were aware of this, and actually nobody from Schwarzenbach had complained, they stuck to the deal we made. The complaints were all coming from the NEXT village! With Swiss goodwill and fairness, we did manage to negotiate an acceptable finish to the concert, of course.

The respect for traffic laws is just amazing. A friend of mine told me, that one late evening, he was concerned that a car with four full grown men of the biker type slowed down next to him, as he was walking the pavement. He was certain that a mugging operation was about to take place. But it turned out that he was very close to a pedestrian crossing on the road, and the big guys were just making sure they were ready to stop if my friend decided to cross the road. The respect Swiss people have for pedestrian crossings is similar to a reli-

gious command. The safest place on the planet must be in the middle of a Swiss pedestrian crossing. No harm can come to you there.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

We are celebrating the Swiss national day today. The day and the occasion reaches back to the 13th century, where three cantons first swore allegiance to each other. And the cooperation between strong cantons has been built upon this start more than 700 years ago. Even today, the cantons and their friendly cooperation and also competition between each other is a cornerstone of your extremely successful country. A decentralised style government, a suspicious attitude to anyone that want to interfere in your private life, the most well integrated multi lingual population in the world, a respectful and friendly attitude towards your own population and guests like ourselves, I think is the explanation of your great success.

Switzerland has stood its ground over the centuries, it has built a model all its own and your model has worked very well, in spite of all the turmoil going on all around your peaceful little oasis. The Swiss are a proud and independent people, but welcoming of guests and visitors.

I am pleased and humble about being a small part of your country today, the family and I feel very well treated, and I thank you on behalf of all the Danes that benefit from your hospitality and friendliness. We all hope that we can also make our small contribution to Switzerland's bright and successful future.

I would like to propose a toast to one of the friendliest, safest, wealthiest, welcoming and generous countries on earth - Switzerland!

Happy National Day!