



**Speech by the President of the Swiss Confederation, Mrs Micheline Calmy-Rey, at the
dinner with opinion leaders from politics, business and academia,
Warsaw, Tuesday 10 April 2007**

As President of the Swiss Confederation it gives me great pleasure to speak to you here in Warsaw today. It was in this country that a historic process was initiated almost thirty years ago which fundamentally changed Europe and indeed impacted on the rest of the world. I have the greatest respect for the role Poland played in this development that had such major consequences for the whole world.

A love for freedom is something that ties our two countries closely together. In Switzerland there are numerous indicators of this solidarity, for example the “Polish Pillar of Freedom” in Rapperswil, near Zurich. This is also where the first Polish national museum was opened. Both of these sent a clear signal to the world: Poland might have disappeared from the map, but it was never banished from people’s hearts and thoughts. Polish poets and musicians, as well as Heads of State, sought refuge in Switzerland. During World War Two, around sixteen thousand Polish soldiers found protection in Switzerland against persecution. I feel proud that, thanks to its openness and humanitarian tradition, Switzerland was able to make a small contribution towards Poland’s struggle for self-determination and freedom.

Ladies and gentlemen

Today we are fortunate to live in a Europe that is peaceful and safe, in which everyone is able to live in freedom and relative well-being. Today, 50 years after the conclusion of the Treaty of Rome, the contribution of European integration to this situation cannot be pointed out enough. Poland joined the EU three years ago. This was the result of a free decision taken by the Polish people. Switzerland is not yet a member of the EU, but we are optimising our joint interests in clearly defined areas on the basis of bilateral agreements.

Switzerland may not be a member of the EU, but it is certainly a member of the European family. Europe is not just the EU. Switzerland is an active member of the European Council and the OSCE. Our economic, cultural, demographic and social ties with Europe are sometimes closer than those between some EU member states. Every third Swiss franc the country earns comes from trade with the EU, more than 2/3 of our exports go to EU countries, and 4/5 of our imports come from the EU. Switzerland is the second largest buyer

of EU goods behind the USA. Amongst the new EU member states, Poland ranks first with regard to direct investment. In other words, we create jobs in Poland. Last year, Swiss exports to Poland increased by more than 20 percent, while Polish imports rose by 15 percent. Poland is our second most important trading partner in the region.

So as you can see, the EU and its 27 member states are Switzerland's most important partners by far. It is therefore clear that an active European policy is of decisive importance for us. Our goal has to consist in creating the best possible contractual basis for co-operating with the EU and its member states. Today we have a solid basis for our relations with the EU, with around twenty primary agreements and almost a hundred secondary ones. Ties between Switzerland and the EU have never been so close as they are today.

Ladies and gentlemen

This bilateral path has meanwhile come to represent a successful pillar of Switzerland's European policy that does not run counter the integration policy of the EU, but rather accompanies it.

The bilateral solution permits a policy of openness and co-responsibility in relations between Switzerland and the EU. It involves a combination of sector-based policies, openness and co-operation, while simultaneously safeguarding institutional independence. Co-operation in the area of cross-border taxation of savings, and the co-ordination of activities in the area of refugee policy, are two good examples of this. At the same time, the bilateral solution means forgoing the right to share in the decision-making process within the EU.

The advantage of the bilateral way is that it gives us a certain flexibility. As these bilateral agreements are sectorial and concluded ad hoc, they are only negotiated in areas where mutual interests exist and appropriate solutions can be found. The flexibility of the Swiss way also permits exceptions, so-called opting-outs. At the same time, we preserve our room of manoeuvre in the field of foreign policy or trade issues.

On the institutional level, the bilateral way does not only offer advantages. This approach means hard work and can lead to tensions and cause a tit-for-tat.

The fact that the EU meanwhile has 27 member states means that the bilateral solution will not become any easier and the associated internal challenges are likely to become more complex. The European Union is not a centralized entity. Its Member States don't share their views on the degree of a centralized decision making, in the field of foreign policy and defence or on the limits of the enlargement.

In this context, many are now asking themselves whether the ultimate goal of European integration, namely the formation of an increasingly compact union of peoples, is truly realistic and in keeping with the times. Some observers are already predicting a transition to a “multi-speed” union or even a union with “variable geometry”. The latter would permit not only different rhythms in the integration process, but also the formation of country groups with variable integration levels, which to some extent is already reality today. For Switzerland, this has two faces. On the one hand side, it does not necessarily simplify our bilateral way. On the other hand, we could find ourselves more integrated into the EU than a Member State – while still not being a member.

Ladies and gentlemen

Solidarity forms the foundations of Switzerland’s political process and its identity, and it does not stop at the country’s borders. Our government, parliament and citizens only recently furnished further proof of this. Last November the Swiss electorate agreed to support the economic and social cohesion of the enlarged EU with a contribution of one billion Swiss francs. This means that, in Poland alone, projects can be implemented that have a value of around 500 millions Swiss francs. This is one of the biggest bilateral co-operation programmes Switzerland has ever undertaken.

Switzerland already began supporting Poland in the nineteen nineties, both economically and in the area of social reforms. It has steadily contributed towards reform and well-being in Poland, focusing on the areas of agriculture and utilities, management and consulting, welfare and healthcare, as well as science and education. Successful projects are still ongoing in rural areas, as well as in cities such as Katowice and Poznań. In this way we want to strengthen our partnership with Poland, which is based on deep respect and mutual trust.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Finally, as President of the Swiss Confederation I would like to pay tribute to a Polish woman whose life and work have left a strong impression on me: Marie Curie, the Nobel prize-winner for chemistry and physics. With immense determination and intelligence she broke through into fields traditionally dominated by men, and demonstrated that women can be equally successful in society and in the field of science. I was especially pleased to be able to hold talks with three women ministers today. Let us take the example of Marie Curie and demonstrate that, through commitment and conviction, we can break down other perceived barriers between men and women.

Thank you for your kind attention.