



**Speech delivered by Mr Jørgen Kosmo,
speaker of the Norwegian Parliament,**

**at the National Council of the Swiss Confederation, Bern,
16 September 2005**

**Centennial Anniversary of the Kingdom of
Norway (1905-2005)**

**Madame la Présidente du Conseil national,
Herr Ständeratspräsident,
Honoured representatives,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,**

**In the early 19th century a number of Swiss farmers came to Norway. They
were there to teach Norwegians about farming and animal husbandry.**

**To this day the expression ‘sveitsere’ is in use in our countryside when
farmers are in need of professional assistance.**

**A favourite restaurant with Norwegians is Frognerseteren in the hills above
Oslo.**

Perhaps some of you have been there.

**This old house was built for Thomas Heftye. Heftye was a prominent
Norwegian financier and cultural personality. He was a co-founder of Den
norske turistforening, the Norwegian Tourist Association.**

No wonder his grandfather was Swiss.

**No wonder either that Thomas Heftye’s grandfather came to Oslo to
establish a successful banking firm.**

Madam Speaker,

**Norway and Switzerland share fundamental democratic values. We also face
the same Europe in transition. We have each chosen our paths. My country is
a long-established member of NATO and a party to the European Economic
Area agreement.**

You, dear colleague, have for centuries cherished your neutrality. You have chosen bilateral agreements to formalise your relations with the European Union.

Yet, our ambition is the same; to secure peaceful relations with one's neighbours and seek stability and prosperity for one's population.

Small nations depend on the outside world. We depend on free trade. We were together co-founders of the European Free Trade Association forty-five years ago.

Small nations depend on political and cultural impulses. We are at the outskirts of Europe. Still we have always been open to rich impulses from across the seas.

Your country is at the crossroads of continental Europe. Your society is more multicultural than almost any other in Europe. You have admirably integrated people from nationalities wide apart.

In 1863 your countryman Henri Dunant founded the International Red Cross.

In 1901 he was, in Oslo, the first recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

He inspired others to follow his cause. One was my countryman Fridtjof Nansen who did groundbreaking work to save lives in Eastern Europe and the Ukraine.

In the spirit of Nansen and Dunant, both Norway and Switzerland seek a strong focus on human rights in international affairs.

It is a great pleasure to be with you here in Bern.

I am honoured to be addressing the National Council.

For seven centuries you, the Swiss, have proudly built your nation – peacefully, prosperously. From four languages, a large number of dialects and a diverse cultural heritage you formed one nation.

The Norwegian nation too is old, but our statehood is young.

This year is special for my country.

We celebrate 100 years since the peaceful dissolution of the union between Sweden and Norway.

We celebrate 100 years of having a voice of our own in international affairs.

Next month, a special part of that dissolution can be remembered. On 30 October 1905, the Norwegian government received a telegram from the Swiss Confederation recognising Norway's independence.

The telegram was gratefully received at ten past six in the afternoon.

Norway of 100 years ago was a poor agrarian society. The nation had not known full political sovereignty since 1380.

However, ever since the union of Sweden was forced upon Norway in 1814 almost all domestic affairs were decided upon by the Norwegian Government and Parliament.

Let me, Madam Speaker, take you back in time, towards the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

In May 1814 - from all over Norway - men of stature and good will seized an opportunity and established a Parliament. They proclaimed independence and signed a new Constitution.

This was an act of revolt against the Swedes.

After more than 400 years of Danish rule, Norway had some months earlier been handed to Sweden following the Peace Treaty at Kiel. Sweden took up arms to secure its booty. Norway was forced to accept the new union.

Clever diplomacy secured the May 1814 Constitution in face of the Swedes.

My ancestors writing the Norwegian Constitution in 1814 were perhaps born and bred at the outskirts of Europe. But they were no novices to the thoughts and ideas of their times.

These ancestors were familiar with Locke, Rousseau and Montesquieu. Whether they knew that Rousseau was born in this country – well, I am sure about that too!

That Constitution was among the most liberal ones of the day, based upon the ideas of the French and American revolutions. The Norwegians of 1814 were forward-looking, and the Constitution survives mostly intact to our time.

The three pillars of modern democracy were firmly established - sovereignty of the people, separation of powers, and the principles of human rights.

Democracy in Norway had older roots as well.

We are a kingdom that can shake hands with the days of the Saga kings of the middle ages.

Norway has an old tradition of the liberty of free men from the days when Norwegian law and custom ruled in large parts of Northern Europe, and kings were acclaimed in the old parliamentary fields.

During the 91 years of our union with Sweden until 100 years ago, Norwegian politics saw continuous struggle between our Parliament and the Swedish King.

After a long and bitter conflict, parliamentarism was introduced in 1884, altering and reducing the personal influence of the King of Sweden in Norwegian affairs.

In some weeks from now, our parliamentary system proves itself again, when a new government, with the support of a majority in the Storting, takes office.

In spite of political struggle, Norway flourished culturally and economically during the union with Sweden.

For the first time since the middle ages, Norwegians made themselves known in intellectual, artistic and political fields.

The playwright Henrik Ibsen, the composer Edvard Grieg, the painter I. C. Dahl and the explorer Roald Amundsen were all at their peak.

These and others were at home throughout Europe, as well as in Norway.

At the same time, Norwegian shipping spanned the world.

Then, in June 1905, in French, German and British newspapers the headlines read "Coup in Norway", "Revolution in the North", "The King dethroned".

Prime Minister Christian Michelsen, a wealthy ship-owner from Bergen, was the architect of the political drama in the Storting in June 1905. He had become Norwegian prime minister in March with one political aim, that Norway should have its own foreign representation, its own consulates abroad. Norwegian independence had been maturing.

Michelsen, a lawyer, wanted to give both national and international legitimacy to Norwegian independence.

The Storting voted a new law that Norway should establish its own consulates abroad and sent it to the King for his consent. King Oscar had no choice but to veto it.

The Norwegian ministers handed in their resignations. The King was forced to recognise that he was unable to form a new government.

Thus, in the morning of 7 June 1905, the Storting stated that Norway no longer had a King and was no longer in union with Sweden as the King had not been able to form a new government.

It was a short document that had been negotiated in secret for days and nights. It was cleverly and carefully formulated.

The decision was presented as a natural consequence of the situation, anchored in radical legal theory.

Your people, Madam Speaker, are familiar with popular referenda. To us in 1905, this was a brand new idea. More than 99 per cent of the vote in our first ever referendum supported the Government's move on the dissolution. Only 184 votes – one hundred and eighty-four - were cast in favour of a continued union.

An idea whose time had come.

The proceedings on the formal dissolution took place in Karlstad, in Sweden, in August and September.

Prince Carl of Denmark was requested to become Norway's new king. He insisted on the Norwegian people's backing! And we had our second referendum of that year.

A large but not overwhelming majority voted for the monarchy as Prince Carl of Denmark became King Haakon of Norway.

Yet even many republicans realised that a monarch from a European royal house would have a soothing influence on the other European monarchies. Prince Carl's wife was even the granddaughter of King Edward of England - a wonderful reassurance.

Constitutional monarchy was still the norm in Europe. I point out, though, your country already then as an exception, Madam Speaker.

1905 however marked the end of the King's personal political power. The King's delaying veto was removed, and only the Storting could decide the laws of the land.

Madam Speaker,

The dissolution of the union in 1905 was peaceful. The emerging crisis between the two neighbours was solved by political means.

This was not self-evident at the time. There was rattling of sabres and prestige involved on both sides.

Next week I will go to Karlstad in Sweden to mark the negotiations.

In our days, when Norway as well as your country is engaged in conflict solving and peace diplomacy around the world, I am certainly happy that we 100 years ago did not find ourselves at war with a neighbouring country so close to us culturally.

In 1814 the Great Powers of Europe had intervened in the High North. The same powers stayed clear of the dispute in 1905 and there was considerable sympathy for the Norwegian cause.

No doubt the outcome in 1905 could have been different had the Great Powers chosen to intervene in support of Sweden.

The peaceful dissolution in 1905 was by no means solely a product of our own political initiative and astuteness. It was a result of a favourable international context and political responsibility, indeed also on the Swedish side.

In Norway in June 1905 there was no rioting in the streets, no guillotines. It all happened in the Norwegian Parliament. It was both a political and legal exercise. ‘The most gentlemanlike revolution the world has ever seen,’ said the British foreign secretary Lord Lansdowne.

I am a child of the parliamentary system. I have spent many of my grown years in the chamber. I care for the proceedings, the traditions, and the political dynamism of a parliament.

Let me share with you some thoughts on the workings of my country’s political institutions.

Our parliamentary system does not mean that a sitting government needs to be backed by a majority in Parliament. It means that a government cannot be *opposed* by a majority. More often than not, we have had minority governments. Next month the first majority government since 1985 takes office.

Most of my fellow citizens could not claim that minority governments have caused problems of political instability. The possibility of bringing down the government may seem to create unstable basis for effective politics. In practice this has not been so.

It is true though that the Parliament plays a bigger political role when the government actively has to seek its approval.

In Norway, the government cannot decide to dissolve Parliament, as it can in many other European countries. The Parliament however can force a government to resign. I have together with some of my colleagues put forward a proposal for a change of the Constitution where the possibility of dissolution is retained.

In Norway constitutional change requires a two-thirds majority. This is hard to achieve, yet I believe not as hard as here in Switzerland. I understand you need the famous double majority of the people and the cantons.

If you read our 1814 Constitution you might be misled about the role of the monarchy. The monarch now overall performs purely symbolic functions.

However, symbolic functions can indeed be important.

Throughout the years of German occupation during the Second World War, King Haakon lived in exile in London. He offered encouragement and support to the Norwegian people and became a symbol for Norwegian resistance. People gathered around illegal radio sets to hear him speak and in Oslo people were arrested for wearing a flower in their lapels on the King's birthday.

A symbol indeed, though powerful.

During the past fifty years, Norway has been transformed from a relatively poor and war-torn country to one of the most affluent nations in the world.

We still have the same geopolitical position - at the edge of the Arctic and at the brim of the Atlantic Ocean. Russia remains our neighbour. The United States is still our major ally, multilateralism, development and conflict resolution our main foreign policy instruments.

From our vast ocean areas, we harvest natural resources and are a major supplier of both energy and proteins.

Hard work, of which you Swiss know so much, an open economy and the development of viable industries in a number of sectors paved the way for success in my country.

Norway's post-war development was built on a strong public sector and the gradual development of the welfare state, not in spite of but because of.

Geologists once said that there were no petroleum resources in the North Sea.

They were proven dramatically wrong.

Starting in the late 1960s, today we are one of the world's top three exporters of crude oil.

The oil and gas export revenues have allowed us to set aside money in a fund for future generations. It is sometimes a struggle to explain why we cannot spend more of the oil revenue, and we do spend a lot on the present generations.

The answer is simply that we have to consider those that will follow us.

I am proud to say that excellent Swiss banking firms assist us in the wise investment of the funds that belong to our future generations.

We should then remind ourselves that a century ago both our countries produced immigrants to the new world because of poverty and lack of jobs.

We have worked hard in Norway, as you have in Switzerland, to achieve economic development that benefits all, where social disparities are relatively small. The concepts of equality and social security are at the core of the system.

I am proud that my party, the Norwegian Labour party, has played a major role in bringing Norway from poverty to wealth - from social injustice to social justice. The welfare state was created in order to give freedom, self-respect and social rights to everyone. No one should need to depend on the charity of others.

I am proud to be associated with the achievements being made by both Labour and Conservative governments during several decades: a society with a relatively small gap between rich and poor, a comprehensive welfare system and low unemployment compared to most countries.

Still we face challenges.

We must make sure that we can finance our welfare system in the future. This is a task for all European countries and much debated also in Switzerland. Renewal is necessary in order to develop the quality of the welfare system and to make it financially viable.

We must do all this by introducing the necessary reforms and strengthening the basis for economic development and creation of wealth.

Let me share with you some thoughts when we look at the world from Norway.

My country has twice, narrowly but clearly, turned down membership in the European Union, in 1972 and again in 1994.

I know where I stand. Alas, my view that Norway's interests would be better served as a full member of the EU does not resonate at the moment. There are several reasons, many of them you will recognise in this country.

A broad majority of my countrymen however favour the European Economic Area agreement, linking us closely to the internal single market of the European Union.

Your country, Madam Speaker, turned down that agreement in 1992. We have noted with interest that you have negotiated a set of bilateral agreements settling your needs with the European Union.

My view is, however, broader than that of economic necessity.

That is the reason for my view of the need for Norwegian membership. Yet I will certainly not speak for your country, Madam Speaker.

Still, we seek to make our influence in the many other fora of international cooperation.

We are proud that we proportion close to one per cent of our gross domestic income to international development.

As a former defence minister, I will impress upon you the historic stability we have gained from our NATO membership. Yet, the world changes. Stemming from our NATO commitment, my country supports the development of a common European security and defence policy. That will enable Europe to take greater responsibility for peace and security on its own continent in the future.

I welcome Switzerland as a member of the NATO Partnership for Peace programme.

Globalisation and economic integration have brought Norway as well as Switzerland riches we could not have dreamt of.

The economic and technological developments also pose new tasks to governments. These challenges can not be dealt with by any one country alone. International cooperation is a necessity, in combating terrorism, protecting the environment and eradicating poverty.

Last week I was in New York at the second World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, together with you Madam Speaker.

The share immensity of the world's challenges is daunting - poverty, armed conflict and strife, terrorism, denial of human rights, aids.

New Orleans in the aftermath of Katrina demonstrates our fragility in the face of natural disaster.

We were all saddened when beautiful Bern was recently flooded.

All this and more does not bode well for the future unless we decide to act.

All scientists agree that climate and greenhouse gases are related. There is agreement that mankind has raised the level of carbon dioxide. There is disagreement on how much of the present climate change could be ascribed to natural variations.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the body of climate scientists, agrees that the Arctic is getting warmer and the sea ice is diminishing. A warmer climate means a windier and wetter climate, and wind strength and rain has increased along the Norwegian coast.

The Kyoto protocol must only be the start of a true political commitment to address the issues of climate change.

The High North - the Arctic and the Barents region - with its rich natural resources is a new frontier for Europe. We will have to manage the natural resources of this fragile area without damaging it. Nuclear safety is an imminent task. The Kola Peninsula of the Russian Northwest has the world's largest concentration of nuclear installations. The threat of a nuclear accident or even use of nuclear power by terrorists is with us.

A key area of Norwegian foreign policy is the continued strengthening of ties with Russia, our neighbour in the northeast.

Peaceful Norwegian-Russian collaboration is a contribution to the security in the entire Euro-Atlantic region.

Because of our joint roles as stewards of the North, Norway must have a political vision of long-term commitment and cooperation.

Crucial to all development is clear jurisdiction. North of Norway are two key issues: The boundary on the continental shelf between Norway and Russia, and what jurisdiction applies around Svalbard?

The Norwegian-Russian disputed area at sea equals 150,000 square kilometres, predicted to be among the richest stretches of sea bed in the world. I am sorry to state that many years of negotiations have not yet led to any conclusive results as to a final delineation.

The issue of the continental shelf around Svalbard, or the Spitsbergen archipelago, is one of applying the Svalbard treaty of 1920. Svalbard is undisputed Norwegian, but the treaty binds Norway to equal rights to

economic activities for citizens and companies of the nations that are signatories to the treaty.

The treaty applies to Svalbard itself and its territorial waters. Norway has introduced a fisheries protection zone around Svalbard. In practice, also in this zone a non-discriminatory regime is being applied.

The Norwegian offshore area is almost seven times larger than continental Norway. Maintaining presence and control is a long-term challenge.

Norway is militarily much less exposed than during the Cold War. The High North with its vast ocean and rich natural resources is still, however, important from a strategic point of view.

In the days of the Cold War, much political and military focus was on the High North. Today, we will have to prevent being marginalised when American and European business seek contacts with their Russian counterparts.

Madam Speaker,

Tomorrow I will go to Schaffhausen. 60 years ago a group of Norwegian concentration camp prisoners, coming out of Dachau, were cared for and brought back to life by the population of Schaffhausen.

We will tomorrow commemorate that noble act by the Swiss people 60 years ago.

I am proud to have been asked to address the National Council in a society that has kept its true democratic origins. I am resigning from office at the end of this month after a long political life. I will keep my visit to Switzerland in my heart.

Thank you for your attention.



Crown Princess Mette-Marit listens to the speech of Mr. Kosmo, president of Norway's parliament,