



Address by Mr François LONGCHAMP
Chairman of the State Council
Launch of the European Reformation Roadmap,
Thursday 3 November, 10.45 a.m., Plaine de Plainpalais, southern
corner.

Mr Federal Councillor,
Mr Secretary General of the World Council of Churches,
Mr Mayor of the City of Geneva,
Distinguished Representatives of the Reformed Churches in
Switzerland and Germany,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The choice of Geneva as the first stop on the *European Reformation Roadmap* is a great honour for our city, especially since the Reformation did not begin here. Geneva was, however, a melting pot.

The organisers of this commemorative journey announced that they had chosen Geneva as the point of departure thanks to its “religious tradition, international aspect, and its reputation as a village of peace and humanism”. However, these are not three distinct and separate qualities. They are all linked. There is a sense of fusion – one might even go so far as to call the three a single unit. Geneva owes its values to a Protestant culture based on hospitality, attention, simplicity, rigour,

and a strong work ethic. It owes not only its economic strength to the Reformation – it was already a wealthy city – it owes its spiritual influence and to a great extent, its humanism to the movement as well.

Geneva owes a lot to Calvin – a father figure for the city. It also owes much to Voltaire and Rousseau, who couldn't be more different as far as – birth, faith, and the vision of society is concerned yet did both possess a sense of irony. It owes Jean-Jacques de Sellon, father of the Society of Peace, and foremost among the opponents to the death penalty. It owes Henry Dunant and the Société genevoise d'utilité publique, which went on to form the Red Cross and laid the foundations for international humanitarian law. It owes the judges in the arbitration tribunal for the *Alabama* claims – the first private and peaceful arbitration tribunal between two nation states. It also owes a great deal to the American president Wilson, who, for this reason, saw Geneva as the perfect location to set up the League of Nations. For these reasons as well as the fact that he was a Presbyterian, and the history of Geneva mattered to him.

It is on these foundations that the International Labour Organization was set up in 1919, followed by the League of Nations, and finally, with all its multilateral bodies, the United Nations. Geneva as an international and humanist city can be traced back to the Reformation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In 1929, Robert de Traz (who was a Protestant) published *L'Esprit de Genève* (The Spirit of Geneva). Before him, the Reformation had

defined *Geneva by its spirit* and its openness. In the 16th and 17th centuries, it took in Protestant refugees. The 18th century saw the construction of a Lutheran church, which is 250 years old this year. In the 19th century, the Republic granted land for the construction of buildings consecrated to other faiths: Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Jewish and Masonic. The 20th century saw the separation of Church and state, the construction of the International Monument to the Reformation in the Bastions Park, and the inauguration of a mosque. In the 21st century, Switzerland is defined as a secular state. This, then, is the universalism of Geneva. There is a clear line, but with different currents, thoughts and backgrounds all coming together. With the exception of Zurich-based pastor Zwingli, there are no Swiss figures on the Reformation Wall. Calvin was French.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The city voted for the Reformation in 1536 prior to welcoming those fleeing persecution. In return, those who came helped to consolidate the prosperity of their new homeland. Geneva owes as much to the world as the world owes to Geneva. We hope that wherever this exhibition celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation visits, whether in Switzerland or abroad, this example will prove a valuable contribution to contemporary reflections on major current issues. Light after darkness: this is Geneva's motto.

The State Council is delighted that Geneva has been selected to open this travelling exhibition. We would like to thank the organisers, and we hope that those accompanying the exhibition on its journey through 67

different towns and cities will meet many wonderful people along the way.