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pour le Réarmement moral

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Caux, 09.07.01

Dear friends,

A new summer, a new season in Caux. It is six o'clock, and already light, but grey. Clouds cover the mountaintops, but the birds aren't discouraged – they're already singing in chorus. The season opened with a bang, nearly three hundred participants, and on Saturday, for the 'official day' some sixty more, diplomats from Geneva and Bern, along with political figures and friends, at the invitation of our president, Cornelio Sommaruga. It was one of the great days in the life of Caux. The first woman Chancellor (Cabinet Secretary) elected by the Swiss Parliament came to bring the greetings of the Swiss government, and there was the President of the Cantonal Parliament of Geneva, also a woman. Some guests were slightly surprised by the others that they met here: 'I didn't know that *they* were interested in this sort of thing!' The guests heard a panel of speakers explaining the life and history of the house and the current conference, before hearing the first Caux Lecture from another pioneering woman, Catherine Bertini, the first American to head a UN agency, and the first woman to head the World Food Programme.

Those of you who are linked to the Internet, I hope you're already getting into the habit of looking up the Caux Web site for the latest news. You'll find there the press release on the opening. This came as the climax to the preparation week, with the house rapidly filling with expectant and hard-working people from every continent – but with a special accent on the eastern part of our European continent. I can still remember the emotion as a young adult, seeing the Berlin Wall, and saying to myself, 'This cannot last for ever, but I will not live to see it fall.' How wrong I was! This change has not brought all the longed-for improvements, but what a change it is: to prepare Caux, and the conferences with young Russians, Moldovans (the largest single group) and Ukrainians, to hear their languages spoken from the platform. I can't help thinking of our forebears, the pioneers of 1946, coming from a continent devastated by war, longing to rebuild, to re-create the social fabric, renew relationships.

I am shaken to hear from a young woman economist and sociologist from Moldova: never in recorded human history has there been such a rapid decline in living standards as in her country since the fall of communism. This is part of the reality of 'globalization'. Her country is now on a par with Nepal and Pakistan, but with a harsh continental climate that means that children are begging bare-foot in snow and minus 20-Celsius temperatures. Holders of doctorates are selling coke and chewing gum in the markets, not finding any other way of earning their livelihood, and the almost universal dream is to leave. She had been threatened by a government minister for telling the truth in a recent book, '*Moldova's Transition to Destitution*'.

A young Ukrainian tells about the struggle in his country to build up 'civil society', to fight corruption and indifference, when those perceived to oppose the regime disappear or are murdered. Yet the atmosphere is not one of discouragement and despair, but of commitment and courage. Under the overall headline for the week of 'Freedom, Responsibility and Leadership', the themes covered so far have taken us from 'Globalization and Freedom', through 'Circles of Responsibility' to 'Effective leadership – Vision'. Now we head on to 'Motive and Courage', 'Teamwork and Cooperation', and

'Moral Dilemmas'. The morning session is followed by workshops and community meetings in smaller groups to go deeper into each day's theme.

There are some echoes of the spirit and labours of 1946 in the fact that in the few weeks between the end of term of the hotel school, so much has to be changed over – *and* all construction work concentrated. So as last year, it was a race against time that was again won, by a whisker. My first morning making coffee for breakfast – in a new place, since the machines have been moved – there was a worker drilling holes in the ceiling and fixing lighting over my head, and then I had to wind my way under a painter's ladder to serve coffee. The next day, the hot water and milk-heating machines had all decided to go on strike. So challenges have been many, but what a cheerful spirit, under the leadership of young volunteers who responded to an invitation posted on the Internet and circulated among friends.

30-40 mainly young people are fully participating in the conference, but also taking part in a four-week *Foundations for Freedom* special summer programme of training and planning, financed by a grant from an 'outside' foundation (more on them next week).

Yesterday at the end of the church service in the Protestant chapel we were blessed in Russian by a Ukrainian minister, in English by an Australian, and in French by the local minister whose parish is expanding and taking on a multi-cultural colour for the summer. And indeed we feel richly blessed, but we know that these weeks won't be carried by our hard work alone. Every day those who can and feel the call, slip out the front door and up to the Catholic Church, between 12 and lunch at 12.30, for a time of silent prayer, to lay before God this bee-hive of activity, to claim the peace and the power we need.

At the opening meeting on Thursday evening, each country was introduced – some 40 at present. And I understood how important it is for those who have been deprived of contact, cut off, to feel that they are meeting the world. And the other continents outside Europe are present and heard. A team from many countries and continents had planned the conference. A simultaneous planning meeting across two time zones bridged by e-mail and phone in London and Chisinau, the capital of Moldova, had prepared the themes and the structure of these days. 'We need to be responsible, not just free; freedom without responsibility only brings negative changes to society,' says a young Moldovan lawyer. Caux helps us to make the link between our character and what we do, says a Western university lecturer. An Albanian mathematician talks of exploring maths, and of the deeper and more vital exploration of God. 'Worry doesn't improve the future; it only spoils the present,' she says.

'I am not afraid of the future,' says a doctor of philosophy. 'I can get a good job, but I'm thinking of my parents and my friends. I live in two worlds. They are not involved in globalization. They watch it on TV as spectators, but how can we all become actors?' 'For me, Caux means a permanent challenge. Caux helps us to find a sense of direction,' says another. I see King Michael and Queen Anne of Romania out on the terrace under the trees, a large circle around them of Romanians and Moldovans. There are tensions between the two nations to be worked out, but there is real communication. In our community, an American responds in tears to what we've heard from Moldova: 'I just don't know what to do, but I want to do something.'

Joe Carter, the African American singer has been working his now-accustomed musical magic – on the official day getting ambassadors and journalists to clap their hands and join in the singing, giving a concert last night that took us into the history of suffering of his people. An amazing way of making the past come alive and touching our hearts.

The Web site of Radio Swiss International (www.swissinfo.org), the local press and other media (the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*) have given first echoes of our opening here.

Warm greetings, Andrew Stallybrass