



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

9th Dialogue on Science – October 13 – 15, 2010
in Engelberg, Switzerland

**Arnold Koller, Prof., former Federal Councillor, Bern,
Switzerland**

Democracy and Federalism

Democracy and federalism are not a priori congruent. They have a lot in common, they complement and strengthen each other, but in isolated cases, they might also be challenged by each other.

Democracy is the form of government for responsible citizens. It allows them to actively participate in public life and to make their contribution by means of direct democracy. Direct democracy is suitable especially for the lower levels of state. Due to highly manageable situations and the fact of being directly affected by the decisions, political participation is facilitated.

Federalism – a system where public tasks are allocated to two or three independent public bodies (central government, regional authorities and municipalities) – establishes favorable conditions for democracy. In addition to the control of power through vertical separation of power between the central government and the regional authorities, proximity, participation and cost efficiency of politics are made possible due to its inherent principle of subsidiarity. These advantages are valid especially in direct democracy. Due to decentralized decision making and possible competition, federalism is structurally close to the market economy. A wide consensus between users, decision makers and paying authorities leads to an economic use of public funds.

In the form of the so-called executive federalism, a tense relationship with democracy can be developed. If this is the case, democracy needs to be ensured through special consultation mechanisms.