

# 2018 ENGELBERG DIALOGUES

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## On courage to face changes in a global environment

Only few might remember that Switzerland has not always been a rich country. For a long period, many Swiss were migrants themselves, forced to leave their home country for economic reasons to look for work abroad. Between the 16<sup>th</sup> and second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more people were leaving Switzerland than migrating into the country. And there have been several periods of strong exodus. As a child, I was fascinated by the stories of confectioners (“Zuckerbäcker”) that went to Sicily and further away to start a new life. And when we had family reunions, the relatives from Brazil were the most fascinating ones as they inspired for a deep dive into thoughts like “what would have been if my great-grandparents had left for Brazil as well”.

According to a recent UN report, 258 million people are currently migrants. A tenth of those are refugees and asylum seekers. An additional 40 million people are refugees within their own country. In 2016, 37% of the permanent Swiss resident population had a migration background. Migrants nowadays are people that look for a new living in an increasingly interconnected world. Compared to centuries ago, modern life has made it easier to move in search for jobs, education and in general a different life. In my opinion it is crucial for a small country like Switzerland to create an environment where it can play an active role in this whole exchange. Furthermore, Switzerland is a country with limited natural resources, thus striving for excellence in other domains.

I am a co-founder of a Swiss company, a spin-off of ETH Zurich, with headquarters in Zurich and also in the UK and US. We are developing next-generation detectors to prevent radioactive sources from misuse and getting into the wrong hands. We foster innovation, and we could most likely not exist if we were not doing things differently than our competitors. To do things differently, one needs to be open to external impulses, new approaches and inspiration. And without people from abroad it would be very difficult to get this input. We thus are dependent on a political environment that allows such exchanges.

I will talk about the challenges a small player faces when confronted with the battle for international talents, the pleasure that it brings when keeping up with international competition, and the conclusion that mobility and migration are main drivers of inspiration that keep innovation alive.