

Switzerland and the international organisations : lecture delivered at the London Rotary Club on January 25th, 1956 [end]

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PASSPORTS

The Consulate wishes to draw the attention of all compatriots to the fact that, even if at the present time this document is not needed very often, particularly if no voyage outside of New Zealand is contemplated, a VALID passport is the only legally recognized identification document of a Swiss citizen abroad. Moreover, only a passport, the validity of which has recently expired, can be renewed without difficulty. It is felt that these facts, coupled with experiences made during the last few months by the Consulate, make it desirable to recommend very strongly that all compatriots take the necessary steps to renew their passports before or immediately after the expiry date.

The "Auslandschweizerwerk der NHG" wishes to inform all compatriots that the Annual Conference for the Swiss abroad ("Auslandschweizertag") will be held at Locarno from 25/26th August, 1956.

Should any compatriots from New Zealand happen to be in Locarno at that time they could be very welcome.

Swiss nationals who possess real estate in Rumania are invited to contact the Consulate at their earliest convenience, but not later than July 31st, 1956.

NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND

Dr. Eduard Zellweger, formerly Swiss Minister to Yugo-Slavia, who was elected a Member of Parliament (National Council) in the last autumn elections, is relinquishing his seat, having been asked by the President of the Government of Lybia to act as his adviser on constitutional matters.

His successor in the National Council will be Rudolf Welter (Socialist), Central Secretary of the "Schweiz. Kaufmannischer Verein (born, 1911).

Britain was the fourth biggest exporter of cars to Switzerland in 1955, exporting 6,340 cars. West Germany, with 31,106 cars was the biggest

exporter, followed by the United States and France.

The cost of sending a Swiss contingent of 60 to the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne will be about £33,500, the Swiss Olympics Committee estimates.

The Swiss sport-tote football pools fund will cover 90 per cent. of travel expenses, 80 per cent of accommodation expenses in the Olympic village, and all insurance and vaccination expenses.

The Swiss contingent will comprise 42 competitors, 12 officials, two gymnastic judges, and four other people.

SWITZERLAND AND THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

(Continuation)

Lecture delivered at the London Rotary Club on January 25th, 1956, by the Swiss Minister,

Monsieur A. Daeniker.

This experience will explain why the question of our participation was hardly discussed when the United Nations Organisation was founded in 1945. Our Government had no ambition to play a specific role in world politics; but it was our conviction that Switzerland could contribute towards the maintenance of peace and the furtherance of international understanding more efficiently by keeping strictly to our permanent neutrality. Our adherence to the U.N. would most certainly have meant abandoning neutrality. Then article two of the Charter demands that unrestricted assistance be given by all members "to any preventive and enforcement action" and similarly, the wording of chapter seven on actions to be taken with respect to threats to peace, breaches of the peace and against acts of aggression, leaves hardly any doubt as to the nature of the obligations and responsibilities involved. It is true that other States which profess a neutral attitude in world politics, have reached different conclusions; Sweden has joined the UNO right at the beginning and the compatibility of her neutrality with those obligations has hardly ever been questioned; even Austria, after announcing her willingness to adopt permanent neutrality, has not been reluctant to apply for and accept membership of the U.N. Such precedents can and do not change the conviction of our people, that membership of the U.N. would mean a departure from an age-long political principle. Being so largely led by practical considerations, they are, moreover, little impressed by the UNO's achievements in solidarity so far.

I hope to have shown you that our neutrality is not an attitude of weakness and has nothing to do with neutralism. It does not mean a policy of abstention from and indifference towards in-

ternational events, nor does it prevent us from participating in the endeavours for the settlement of conflicts or the establishment of world peace. Our special position allowed us to engage in essentially humanitarian activities during both world wars and after. Neither the International Red Cross nor the League of Red Cross Societies and other organisations could have attained their aims in war as thoroughly, if they had not been located between the two fronts. During World War II our Government has accepted more than 40 mandates as a diplomatic caretaker for the safeguarding of foreign interests. In parts at least it must also be due to our healthy political and social climate that UNO has maintained its European headquarters in Switzerland despite our abstention and that Geneva often has been chosen as the ideal place for international political conferences.

You will also be aware of a tendency to saddle Neutrals with international political functions; a tendency which may give a new significance to neutrality. Such tasks can only be carried out by truly neutral nations who enjoy the confidence of both sides and act with impartiality and objectivity. My country has accepted such tasks in Korea concerning the execution of the Armistice Agreement and the repatriation of prisoners of war; we are equally willing to take part in the International Commission which was to supervise the process of self-determination in the Sudan. Such mandates may be a step aiming at a novel integration of neutrality into modern world politics; neutrality, far from being a purely passive attitude, must now take solidarity as its partner; these are in fact the guiding principles of modern Swiss foreign policy.

Switzerland has always supported international co-operation in technical, social or humanitarian fields free from political influences. The Universal Postal Union, the United Offices for the Protection of Intellectual Property, the Telecommunications Union and the Central Office for international railway transports, have long ago been placed under the supervision of the Federal Council and are now closely linked with UNO; Switzerland participates actively in such sub-agencies of UNO as the International Labour Organisation, the UNESCO, the FAO, the WHO, the IRO and the UNICEF (which, incidentally, is presided over by a Swiss), and the Office for Technical Aid to Under-developed Countries.

It needs therefore hardly any comment why Switzerland has kept aloof from NATO and the Western European Union and why she has been reluctant to join the Council of Europe, at least in so far as it tends towards a political integration of certain States to the exclusion of others, and before discussions on military subjects will be excluded from its deliberations.

The situation is wholly different with the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation.

Here we are faced with an institution having solely economic aims, willing to offer membership to any European State. When our country joined OEEC in 1947, we made three conditions: that we should not accept any undertaking incompatible with our neutrality; that resolutions of the OEEC affecting our economy should not be binding on the Confederation unless expressly agreed to; that we should not be precluded from the conclusion of commercial treaties with European non-members of the Organisation.

In defending the interests of our national economy, we think it best to be guided by enlightened self-interest in which joint action, due regard for the economy of the partner and the community of nations, are necessary prerequisites. Already between the two wars we defended the principle of multilateral trade and free payments. For Switzerland, whose exports amount to 35 per cent. of its national produce and whose invisible transactions are the highest per capita in the world, it was imperative to strive for the liberation of trade from quantitative restrictions, for the suppression of exchange controls and for the return to genuine convertibility. We accepted bilateralism only out of necessity, and in as far as it had been imposed on us, but we have always been able to keep our currency convertible and therefore abstained from discriminatory measures. Already under bilateralism we were forced to grant large credits to our partners in order to stimulate the exchange of goods.

The creation of the European Payments Union, however, has greatly enlarged our exports; the portion of our trade with EPU partners amounts to not less than 60 per cent. of our total trade and during the five years of adherence, i.e., up to the middle of 1955, our total transactions with those countries reached the respectable sum of 42.7 billion francs, or roughly 3.500 million pounds. Within the Paris Organisation, our endeavours were mainly directed towards a gradual reduction of the quantitative restrictions on imports and particularly on the transfer of invisibles. We extended our own import liberalisation up to 93 per cent. Obviously enough, we are interested in a gradual return to full convertibility and we would have no difficulty to maintain it; our main concern today is to avoid any failure of this experience and the maintenance of stable currencies. That's why, until convertibility is reached, we favour the continuance of a multilateral payments accounts system as under EPU.

As mentioned before, we are not members of the International Monetary Fund; in principle we should welcome any institution which aims at consolidating the international monetary situation and tries to prevent the further devaluation of currencies for the sake of commercial competition, and which would thus pave the way to a return to orthodox financial practice. We had,

however, to take objection to the "scarce money clause" in the Bretton Wood Agreement which allows the member countries to discriminate against the currency which has been declared scarce, without giving the interested State the means for adequate defence. The risk of such action induced our abstention from the Fund and so barred us automatically from membership with the International Bank for Development and Reconstruction. In spite of this, our banking circles work closely with the Bank, who raised within recent years up to 300 million francs or 25 million pounds on the Swiss market.

How shall we, however, explain the absence from the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade? Given our very restricted home market and our predominant interest in external trade, we are not less concerned with the abolition of qualitative trade barriers, i.e., import duties, than with the reduction of quantitative restrictions. Our objections were similar to those which prevented our adherence to the Monetary Fund. GATT has absorbed some regulations from the abortive Havana Trade Charter. These allow soft currency countries with an adverse balance of payments to maintain, amongst others, quantitative import restrictions and to discriminate against hard currency countries; they would not allow the latter to retaliate and we should therefore risk to have the chances for our exports particularly of "non-essentials" curtailed without any possibility of redress. It is to be hoped that as more countries recover their economic strength it will be easier to overcome this difficulty; yet even so Switzerland could not join GATT without due protection for its agricultural production which today engages only 17 per cent. of our total population. Last, but not least, we cannot enter GATT without the necessary armour; our customs duties are amongst the lowest in Europe; in 1954, they averaged only 6.1 per cent. (without tobacco and petrol); hence our specific tariff of 1921 is now under revision.

This short survey of the Swiss attitude towards the international organisations would not be complete if I did not mention the European movement towards economic integration, as represented by the European Coal and Steel Community. Our interest therein rests on the fact that Switzerland imports 80 per cent. of all her coal and steel from these territories. Our Government has therefore accredited a special mission in Luxembourg. As with OEEC, Switzerland has to insist that no resolution which is to bind her will be taken without her explicit consent. Such reductions of sovereign rights as are demanded by a supernational authority would hardly be consented to by our people; and if we rather prefer collaboration on a co-operative basis to integration, our attitude also towards the ideas formulated in the so-called Messina Resolutions, is thereby clearly outlined.

How are we to explain this insistence on sovereign rights, this cautious, yet not negative approach to the problems of international organisation, which still permits us to keep an open mind towards the demands of human solidarity? Why were we not worried when lately an English publicist described our policy as anachronistic as that of Venice of two hundred years ago? I think it is because we are, and want to remain, a small State, conscious of the risks yet also aware of the advantages of our position. Our greatest historian, Jak. Burckhardt, said in his "Reflections on History": "The small State exists, so that there may be a spot on earth where the largest possible proportion of the inhabitants are citizens in the fullest sense of the word; for the small State possesses nothing but real, actual freedom, an ideal possession which fully balances the huge advantages of the big State—even its power." It is for the defence of their civic rights and liberties that the Swiss renounced expansionist plans, that they defended their democratic rights and autonomies against a centralised Government, that they chose federation as their internal structure and neutrality as their guide in foreign policy; and that is the reason why we were able to preserve on a tiny territory such a great and rich variety of political and cultural life.

The end.

CORRESPONDENCE: Please address to the Secretary,

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