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The Swiss Presence abroad: Useful Coordination Efforts

General

The Swiss presence abroad has many aspects: collaboration within international organizations, humanitarian aid, cultural, scientific and sporting events, participation in trade fairs and world exhibitions etc. This very diversity means that the Swiss presence is promoted by institutions of quite different kinds belonging not only to the public sector (for example, the Department of Foreign Affairs) but also to the semi-public (for example, Pro Helvetia) and the private sector (for example, the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique). A logical consequence is that coordination between these various spheres is not particularly easy, and in 1970 the Federal Assembly took the view that a greater effort would have to be made to improve it, especially as the majority of the institutions concerned receive financial support from the Confederation.

The Expert Commission

In response to Parliament's wish the Federal Council set up an initial coordinating body in 1972 and instructed it to work out – under the chairmanship of Mr Willy Spühler, the former Federal Councillor – an overall concept of the Swiss presence abroad. After wide consultations embracing our diplomatic and consular missions, the agencies of the Swiss National Tourist Office (SNTO), Swissair and numerous Swiss and foreign personalities, the Commission presented its

report to the Federal Council in December 1974. That document surveyed the question of Switzerland's image abroad, analyzed the structures of the main institutions involved in reflecting our country beyond its frontiers, listed the various forms of «presence» and laid down the principles which should guide our future activities in this field.

The Appointment of the «Coordinating Commission for the Swiss Presence Abroad»

On the basis of the report the Federal Council proposed to the Federal Assembly that the former consultative body should be transformed into an institution and that it should be given certain decision-making powers to enable it, in particular, to carry out its programme and to improve coordination between its members. Parliament complied with this proposal in March 1976 and agreed to put at the new body's disposal an annual credit of approximately 1 million francs (in 1978 and 1979 this amounted to 0.7 million).

Seventeen institutions are represented on the Commission:

- the Federal Chancellery
- the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
- the Federal Department of the Interior
- the Federal Department of Public Economy
- the Federal Department of Transport, Communications and Energy



The former Federal Councillor Ernst Brugger, President of the Commission since 1979 (Photo ASL)

- the Pro Helvetia Foundation
- the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade
- the Swiss National Tourist Office
- the Swiss Radio and Television Company
- the Swiss National Fund for Scientific Research
- the Organization of the Swiss Abroad of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique
- the Federal Commission on Gymnastics and Sport-Swissair
- the Swiss Cities Association
- the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Directors of Education
- the Swiss Journalist's Federation
- the Union of Swiss Chambers of Commerce Abroad

Having already chaired the Expert Commission, Mr Spühler became the first chairman of the new coordinating body in 1977. Another former Federal Councillor, Mr Ernst Brugger, succeeded him at the beginning of 1979.

Regional and Sectoral Priorities

The first consequence of the inquiry it had conducted abroad in 1973/74 was the establishment by the Commission of a number of priorities, on the one hand regional and on the other sectoral.

From the regional angle the emphasis was placed on countries which are of particular importance to Switzerland but which, taken individually, had not been regarded as priorities by the member-institutions in the early seventies; an example would be Italy, and the Arab world would be another.

As to sectoral priorities, they arise mainly from the need to improve general information about our country. This did not previously figure among the tasks of any of the existing organizations, with the exception of Radio Suisse Internationale, even if one or other of them, notably Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade and the SNTO, sometimes endeavoured to fill the most flagrant gaps. The latter were most apparent in the sectors of printed matter, sound recordings and films, so that is where the Commission concentrated its initial efforts.

Moreover, although they were not originally included among the priority sectors, the Commission's attention was particularly directed to the Swiss Weeks and the Swiss pavilions at foreign fairs and exhibitions because of their many-sided character. Nor should it be forgotten that the new coordinating body had also been appointed by the Federal Council as a commission on world exhibitions. It will therefore be responsible in future for pronouncing upon plans for Swiss pavilions and for organizing our country's participation in such exhibitions.

Initial Achievements

Some of the sittings at the time of the Expert Commission had already been devoted to reciprocal information. Of course, that is where all efficient coordination starts, especially if the aim is to avoid duplication and gaps.

In the case of printed matter, a first step had been taken, even before the Commission had become an institution, with the re-issue of the «Osaka Cassette». This consisted of four richly illustrated volumes entitled «Focus on Switzerland», which presented various aspects of our country (landscape, history and institutions, cultural life, the economy) and which received an award in 1976 as one of the most attractive Swiss books of the year. Fifty thousand copies were printed in five different languages and very widely distributed abroad, notably to municipal and university libraries, political, economic and cultural circles, journalists etc. At a quite different level, the Commission considered it appropriate to respond to the tens of thousands of inquiries, mainly from schoolchildren and students, which are addressed each year to our diplomatic and consular missions. In close collaboration with the SNTO a poster-folder was devised to satisfy these needs. Nearly a million copies were produced in about 20 different languages. On one side is a large reproduction of one of our mountain landscapes, while text about our country, with numerous photographs and some statistical tables, appears on the other.

Many general works on Switzerland have also been acquired to improve information about institutions, traditions and customs.

Another priority sector is films. The Commission gave one of its working groups the task of drawing up a list of documentary films

suitable for showing abroad and of acquiring a number of copies with a view to enlarging the existing stocks (particularly at SNTO agencies and embassies) or creating new ones. In an initial phase nearly 350 copies have been added in this way to extremely modest stocks.

The same working group has applied itself to the problem of collaboration with foreign mass media and more particularly with those of the Third World. It will be possible in the near future to offer them documentary films and certain Swiss Radio and Television broadcasts on very favourable terms. However, Switzerland is not doing anything new in this sector, she is merely following the example of several other countries, notably European ones, which have made enormous efforts with this type of collaboration; nevertheless, a consequence of our traditional neutrality is that many Third World countries especially seek to collaborate with Switzerland.

And now a few more words about the many and varied events covered by the term «Swiss Weeks».

The Commission carried out its first experiment of this kind in Linz in October 1977. It had a considerable success, particularly in activities which took place in the public squares (for instance, brass bands, folk-dancing, exhibitions under canvas etc.). Many other events (cultural, political and scientific conferences, exhibitions, Swiss cinema weeks, concerts, sporting contests, gastronomy, competitions) have made it possible to reach very diverse audiences.

A second Swiss Week, of a more commercial character, was organized by the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade in Kansas City in 1978, with the support of the Coordinating Commission.

The latter took charge again in 1979 by launching an Italian-Swiss friendship week at Bari, situated in the middle of an important region for emigration to Switzerland.

Future Prospects

The modest means made available to the Commission certainly do not enable it to pursue a very grand policy ... During the next few years it will continue on its way steadily and patiently, putting a little oil here and there in the coordination mechanism, devel-

oping the general documentary on Switzerland, encouraging the use of the film medium to reflect our country, filling certain gaps in our stock of information documentaries (for example, there are practically no films which could be used abroad about our political institutions, our militia system, scientific research, our principal industries etc.), launching Swiss Weeks in the priority regions etc. And already the next world exhibition is appearing on the horizon – it will take place in Australia in 1987 ...

New Chance for Children of Swiss Women

Under Article 44, paragraph 3, of the Federal Constitution federal legislation can provide that the child of a Swiss woman and her foreign husband is automatically a Swiss national if the mother is a Swiss national by descent and the parents are resident in Switzerland at the time of the birth. This constitutional competence was only fully exploited in favour of the children of Swiss women in the revision of the Children Act which came into force on 1st January 1978. If the above conditions were fulfilled, children who had not reached the age of 22 by that date had one year, that is to say, until 31st December 1978, to apply for recognition as Swiss nationals. This transitional provision has given rise to various questions of interpretation. In particular, the Federal Court decided only after the expiry of the time-limit, namely on 29th June 1979, that the concept «Swiss by descent» is to be interpreted much more widely than had previously been assumed in that it covers persons who were included in their parents' nat-

uralization, or whose naturalization was facilitated (but not Swiss women who were naturalized independently or who acquired Swiss nationality by marriage). The range of children affected is thus extended considerably.

Parliament therefore decided in its December 1979 session to introduce a *new time-limit* of one year for the submission of an application (to the competent authority of the mother's canton of origin) for recognition as a Swiss national. This new time-limit will date from the expiry, unused, of the three-month period allowed for a referendum (approximately April 1980).

All children who were not yet 22 years old on 1st January 1978, whose mothers are Swiss nationals by descent and whose parents were resident in Switzerland at the time of the birth, can avail themselves of it.

It should also be noted that the federal authorities have begun a more extensive revision of the provisions governing nationality in the family.

The Federal Authorities in 1980:

President of the National Council:
Hanspeter Fischer

President of the Council of States:
Josef Ulrich

President of the Confederation:
Georges-André Chevallaz

Vice-President of the
Federal Council:
Kurt Furgler

Chancellor of the Confederation:
Karl Huber

President of the Federal Court:
Harald Huber

President of the Federal Insurance
Court:
vacant (Jean-Daniel Ducommun
† 8.12.1979)

Composition of the Federal Council and allocation of Departments:

Department of Foreign Affairs:
Pierre Aubert

Department of the Interior:
Hans Hürlimann

Department of Justice and Police:
Kurt Furgler

Military Department:
Georges-André Chevallaz

Department of Finance:
Willi Ritschard

Department of Public Economy:
Fritz Honegger

Department of Transport,
Communications and Energy:
Léon Schlumpf

Federal Ballots 1980

2nd March	8th June
28th September	30th November

