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Excerpt

from an address given by Mr Frédéric Dubois, Director of the Federal Office for Cultural Affairs, at the Congress of the Swiss Abroad 1980

I have never before been called upon to deal with the question about which I am now going to speak to you: the Swiss schools abroad. Having only recently been appointed head of the Federal Office for Culture, I felt that your invitation gave me an occasion to look into the matter. Trying to make a virtue of necessity I approached it with an open mind, needless to say, but also in a spirit of constructive criticism.

The first discovery one makes is that it is possible for a Swiss diplomat to complete his career without ever coming into contact with a Swiss school abroad. Why? Well, because there are only 19 of them, eight being in Italy. The others are in Accra, Bangkok, Barcelona, Bogotá, Lima, Madrid, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro, Santiago, Sao Paulo and Singapore.

You can see at a glance that history and tradition were responsible for the way they are scattered around the world, parallel to Switzerland's economic expansion last century and in the early 1900s. They were originally created in a pragmatic fashion, with no overall plan, and the Confederation was not involved. They were the work of pioneers, the result of vigorous personal initiative. They bear witness to the ability and the will of Swiss colonies established in countries which were (and to some extent still are) behind Switzerland in certain respects. Quite a number of those colonies played an important role in their host countries. Their schools were tolerated. They were – and they remain – strictly private institutions.

The principal motive for the creation of those schools was to give Swiss children abroad an education in keeping with the spirit, the methods and the aims of Swiss education and to make it easier for them to continue their studies if they returned to Switzerland. The wish that the children should have a neutral education from the religious standpoint was also a big factor. Furthermore, the school system in many of the countries concerned was far from fulfilling Swiss criteria and requirements, though this situation has improved. Finally, the colonies wanted, to some extent, to «keep themselves to themselves» and avoid integrating as much as possible. But there, too, things have changed a great deal. With the passage of

time the purpose of the schools has been broadened to include the following goals: to make it easier for Swiss firms to recruit staff for their branches abroad, to strengthen the relations of the Swiss abroad among themselves and to play a central role in their communities. By their permanent presence these institutions also represented, albeit modestly, a certain Swiss cultural presence in their host countries. Lastly, they gave Swiss teachers a chance to acquire a more profound knowledge of other nations and cultures while extending their linguistic and professional proficiency.

Aid from the Confederation was rather a long time coming and was not put on a legal basis until 1947. Its fundamental character, now that it is based on a federal Act, has not changed: the Confederation has only undertaken to subsidize the schools if certain conditions are fulfilled. However, the figures show clearly that we have here a special case. The 14.3 million francs allotted this year represent about two-thirds of the schools' income. A critical threshold has thus been crossed, both materially and morally. The schools are now, without exception, dependent upon the Confederation, which is very undesirable because they are private institutions. It should also be noted that in many of the colonies financial resources and the willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of their schools have been diminishing appreciably for some time, especially since the Act came into force in 1976.

Now that I have sketched in the outlines, I must give you the figures. Nothing reveals the true position more plainly.

As we have seen, there are, in all, 19 Swiss schools abroad. Ten of them educate their pupils up to the matriculation examination; as to the rest, the majority start with nursery school and end with the completion of secondary school studies.

The schools cater for 6,100 pupils, of whom 2,100 have Swiss nationality or a Swiss mother; there are 220 Swiss teachers.

Aid from the Confederation amounted to 14.3 million francs in 1979, that is to say, more than 2,500 francs per pupil. If we count only the Swiss children, who are the sole justification for these schools, that represents 7,000 francs per pupil.

Federal aid constitutes two-thirds of these schools' income, the rest coming, for the most part, from school fees. So the Confederation provides considerable support, as you see, but has no influence on the educational principles of the schools which, in a strict legal sense, remain private institutions.

What I have just told you reveals a situation which poses not a few problems. May I outline it briefly for you:

Hitherto the Confederation's attitude to the schools has been apt to give rise to illusions. The Federal Council's «Message» of 21st December 1973 concerning the draft federal Act reflects this attitude: praise and generous promises were lavished on the schools but there was no critical consideration of their role. It is therefore not surprising that the Confederation's object in aiding these schools has not been made clear. Today the facts speak for themselves. People are questioning the reasons for sending children to the Swiss schools – reasons which should justify federal aid. Is it still appropriate to educate children in accordance with the so-called Swiss spirit when we know that they will never return to their country of origin? Would it not be more sensible for the second, third or fourth generation to integrate completely into their host country, as many Swiss families already do? Federal aid can only be justified today by the need to prepare children for transfer to schools in Switzerland.

In many countries it is no longer possible for private schools run by foreigners to lead a discreet existence secure from state intervention. Official controls have been strengthened. Will not the desired integration end by destroying our schools' *raison d'être*? Illegality, which is still frequent, cannot and must not be tolerated any longer. Some schools have structural difficulties. The concept behind the financing and management of the Swiss schools abroad was developed in the 19th century and is based on the existence of a strong colony with not only the financial means but also the necessary people for an institution run largely on an honorary basis. The Act makes the recognition of a school – and the continuance of that recognition – subject to clear conditions, whose effect is to accentuate the structural weaknesses of some schools. The Confederation's financial crisis does not permit of any increase in subsidies. This situation has forced the Federal Department of the Interior, and the Federal Council, to undertake a critical examination of the principles governing the support that is given. What mistakes have been made and what are the chances of attaining the objectives of federal aid?

The Act and the Ordinance clearly state the conditions on which a subsidy will be granted. In several cases these conditions are either not being fulfilled at all or are only partially fulfilled. The main reason is almost

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studies in our homeland. However, the statistics show a constant reduction in the number of pupils with this goal in view. Other aims, especially those covered by the vague phrase «cultural presence» (a task whose complexity should not be underestimated and for which we have other – more appropriate – instruments), cannot conceal this state of affairs. On the other hand, we know that in many places there are large numbers of Swiss children who have no opportunity to attend a Swiss school. This is true of nearly all the French-speaking children, a matter to be taken seriously in view of our federal state's linguistic and cultural mixture. One can rightly speak of legal inequality in federal aid to the Swiss abroad.

The Federal Council shares the opinion of the Federal Department of the Interior that the situation definitely calls for therapy. In some cases surgery is required; in others, the treatment, if I can put it that way, will be medical, since the aim will be to eradicate the disease.

First of all, we must thoroughly examine those schools which no longer fulfil the legal conditions for recognition or which only survive thanks to the federal subsidies. I should like to stress the fact that this examination – which has already started – will be carried out in close collaboration with those responsible for the schools and other interested circles.



always the same: the colonies concerned are no longer what they were. They are not vigorous enough to go on running their schools efficiently.

What can still be achieved in these circumstances? The object of the Act, at least from today's standpoint, is to enable children of the Fifth Switzerland to continue their

The Federal Authorities 1981:

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Laurent Butty

President of the Council of States:
Peter Hefti

President of the Confederation:
Kurt Furgler

Vice-President of the Federal Council:
Fritz Honegger

Chancellor of the Confederation:
Karl Huber

President of the Federal Court:
Rolando Forni

President of the Federal Insurance Court:
Theodor Bratschi

Federal Ballots 1981

5th April 27th September
14th June 29th November

Composition of the Federal Council and allocation of Departments:



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Department of the Interior:
Hans Hürlimann

Department of Justice and Police:
Kurt Furgler (our photo: E. Rieben)

Military Department:
Georges-André Chevallaz

Department of Finance:
Willy Ritschard

Department of Public Economy:
Fritz Honegger

Department of Transport, Communications and Energy:
Léon Schlumpf

Right to vote of the Swiss abroad

As you know, the Swiss abroad entitled to vote, must be present in Switzerland in order to participate in federal voting and elections. Requests are repeatedly being made to allow voting by mail or at the offices of Swiss representations (Embassy, Consulate-General or Consulate). We are conducting a survey with the view of examining the various consequences that facilitating the vote in the above-mentioned manner might bring. It is important for you and the federal authorities that as many of the Swiss abroad as possible answer the following questions, irrespective of whether they are for or against the right to vote of the Swiss abroad.

We kindly request you to complete the questionnaire below and to mail it in a closed envelope as soon as possible, but not later than May 15th, 1981 to the Swiss representation where you are registered. Please be sure to give your surname, first names and full address. The questionnaires will be forwarded to us, with no mention of names.

Federal Department
of Foreign Affairs,
Service for the Swiss Abroad

— please cut out —

Questionnaire

concerning the right to vote of the Swiss abroad

(please mark the correct answer)

1. Were you born in Switzerland? 1 2
yes no
2. Year of birth? 3
3. Were you ever placed on the voting-list of a Swiss commune, as a Swiss living abroad? 7 8
yes no
4. Have you ever taken part in federal voting and elections as a Swiss living abroad?
To be completed only if point 3 is answered in the affirmative 9 10
yes no
5. How often did this occur? 11 12 13
3 times 4-6 t. 7 and more t.
6. Would you welcome voting from abroad? 14 15
yes no
7. If «no», for what reasons?
16 because 17
on principle of dual-nationality
19
too involved
18 insufficient knowledge of 20
Swiss problems other reasons
21
8. If «yes», how would you prefer to vote:
22 by mail
23 personally at the Swiss representation
24 Embassy, Consulate-General, Consulate
25 no opinion
9. Where would you like your vote to be counted? 24
25
In one of your communes of origin?
In one of your previous communes of residence?
10. If such a facilitation would be instituted, to what extent would you participate in federal voting and elections? 26 27 28
often occasionally never

11. Remarks

Seal
of the
representation

Questionnaire

for spouse, if any, of Swiss nationality

concerning the right to vote of the Swiss abroad

(please mark the correct answer)

1. Were you born in Switzerland? 1 2
yes no
2. Year of birth? 3
3. Were you ever placed on the voting-list of a Swiss commune, as a Swiss living abroad? 7 8
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Seal
of the
representation