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Summary of the «Message» concerning Switzerland's accession to the United Nations (UN)

Approval of the Proposal

The Federal Council passed the «Message» concerning Switzerland's accession to the United Nations (UN) on the 21st of December 1981. It proposes to Parliament that the latter should approve our country's entry into the world organization. The final decision rests with the people and the cantons who, according to the Federal Constitution, must vote on this question.

Importance of the Proposal Accession to the UN is an important step for Switzerland which will enable her to nor- malize her relations with the world organization and thereby to consolidate and expand her relations with the international community.

The Federal Council is today proposing accession to the UN after mature consideration and after closely following developments in the matter. Not only did it set up advisory commissions in 1945 and 1976 to study thoroughly the question of entry; in 1969, 1971 and 1977 the Federal Council itself defined in three detailed reports to the Federal Assembly all aspects of our relationship with the United Nations and its specialized organs. By 1977 it had come to the conclusion that accession to the UN was desirable. Parliament agreed and the National Council even asked the Federal Council to lay the relevant «Message» before it «as soon as possible».

It is time for Switzerland to take this step; as a member of the international community our

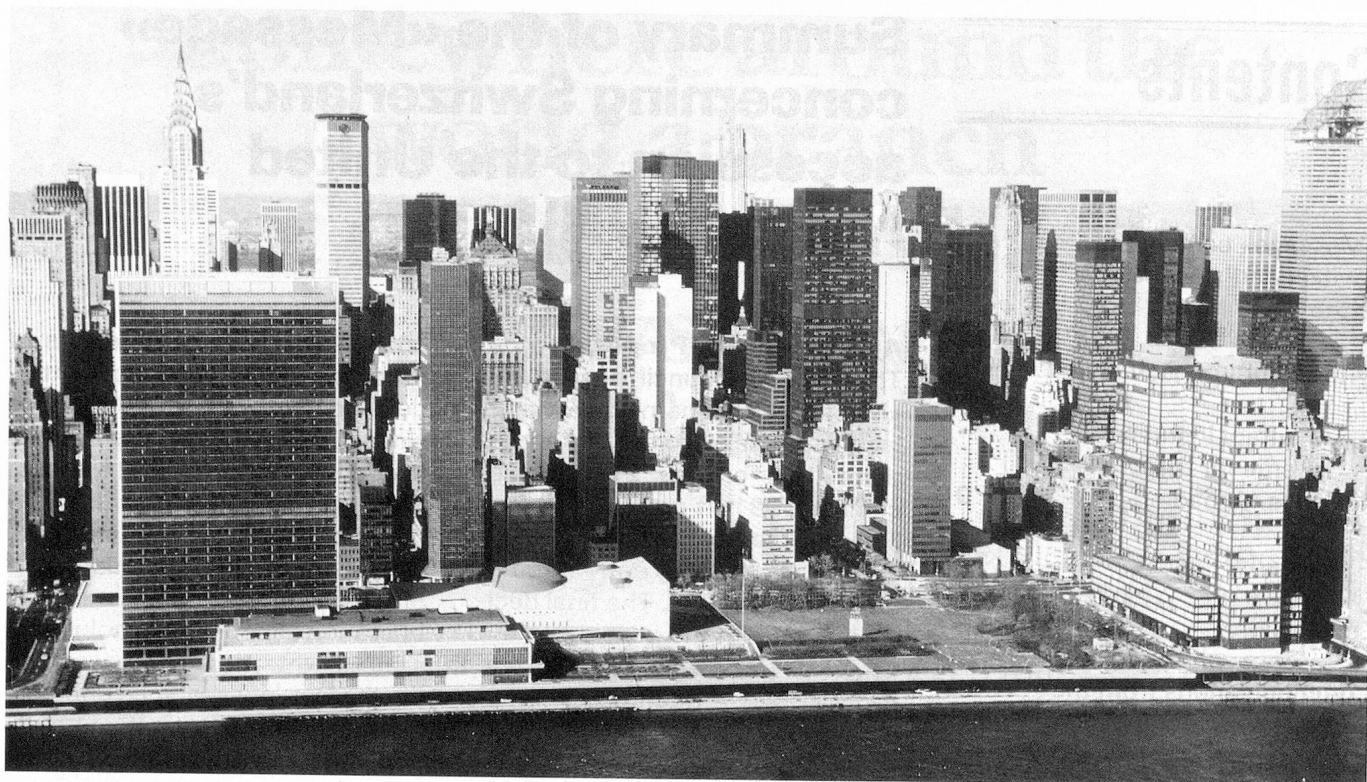
country must, in the interests of its own security, take account of developments in world politics since 1945 and their consequences for the United Nations. The growing interdependence of nations and the universal nature of an ever increasing number of problems call for worldwide co-operation aimed at joint solutions. That is why there has been, during the last few years, an unprecedented upsurge in multilateral diplomacy. Its principal instrument and at the same time the focus where the nations' efforts converge is the United Nations, which constitutes the basis of international order in a world torn by conflicts and tensions.

The UN of Today

The UN of the 1980s is very different from what it was in 1945 at the time of its foundation. It has been greatly affected by developments in international politics, of which it is both the reflection and the instrument. Originally conceived as a coalition of the victorious powers of the Second World War, aimed at preserving world peace by collective enforcement measures, **the UN is today the centre of worldwide cooperation.** It became apparent during the Cold War that the system of sanctions provided for in the Charter was largely ineffective because of disagreement among the Great Powers. The UN has never used military sanctions. Moreover, the existence of nuclear weapons has transformed the nature of conflicts and that has led the UN to **develop new**

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UN Headquarters in New York

methods of maintaining peace, such as mediators or observers and contingents of Blue Berets. The UN has thus created an instrument, on a voluntary basis, capable of creating the preconditions for a peaceful settlement of conflicts or at any rate of contributing to the search for such a settlement.

The UN's most important transformation, however, lies in **the universality** it has attained, in respect of both its **members** and its activities. The initial reservations about the neutral states very soon disappeared. As early as 1946 Sweden was admitted to the organization. Austria and Finland followed in 1955. The final defeat of the original conception of the UN as an alliance of the victors of the Second World War was manifested by the admission of the two German states to the UN in 1973.

The UN's progress towards universality has gone hand in hand with an **extension of its activities**. Its central task is the

maintenance of peace. But peace and international security are threatened not only by armed conflicts but also by economic and social problems. Because the UN recognizes this fact its activities today cover all questions of international cooperation in the political, economic, social, legal, cultural and humanitarian spheres.

Nearly all the conflicts of our time end up at the UN. With the growing importance of the Third World as a political and economic power, the North-South dialogue is also occupying an increasingly significant place in the work of the United Nations, where the political implications predominate. It will suffice here to recall that, having achieved political independence, the developing countries are striving for greater economic self-reliance. They are seeking to bring about a world economic system which would take account of their particular needs. The resolutions on this subject passed by the General As-

sembly, and other activities concerning the shaping of international economic relations, are also important to Switzerland, for the ideas which emerge from the General Assembly have an ideological and political influence on the future course of international economic negotiations – wherever these may take place – which should not be underestimated.

The political impulses emanating from the UN are crucial for all the work done within the framework of the United Nations system. For without the political will it would not really be possible to solve the grave problems, such as the growing number of refugees, famines and other disasters, the protection of the environment, nutrition, health and education, which all fall within the UN's field of activity.

A Tendency towards a Unified UN-System

Another phenomenon which has grown during the last few years is

important for our relations with the United Nations. That is the tendency of the whole United Nations system towards unity. This means that the General Assembly is increasingly acquiring a central role for the UN and for all its subsidiary organs and specialized agencies. It is in the General Assembly that the climate of interstate relations is most directly manifested and that the possibilities of reaching agreement take shape. It is there, in fact, that the expansion of international cooperation is most evident. Many of the changes in international relations during the last few years were instigated or taken up by – or are reflected in – the General Assembly. The latter therefore takes decisions of principle which serve as guidelines for the work of other UN bodies. The former distinction between the political and the technical UN no longer exists. Today questions of a political nature are also brought into the subsidiary organs and specialized agencies. Conversely, the General Assembly increasingly discusses the political aspects of technical questions, even when these fall within the competence of the specialized agencies, which perform their functions independently and autonomously. Such debates sometimes lead to negotiations which affect Switzerland.

It is in the light of these developments that **Switzerland's accession to the UN** should be judged. The evolution of the UN shows that not only is Swiss membership now possible but it has become necessary.

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Swiss Foreign Policy and UN-Membership: The Question of Neutrality

According to the Federal Constitution, the paramount aim of the Swiss Confederation is to maintain the country's inde-

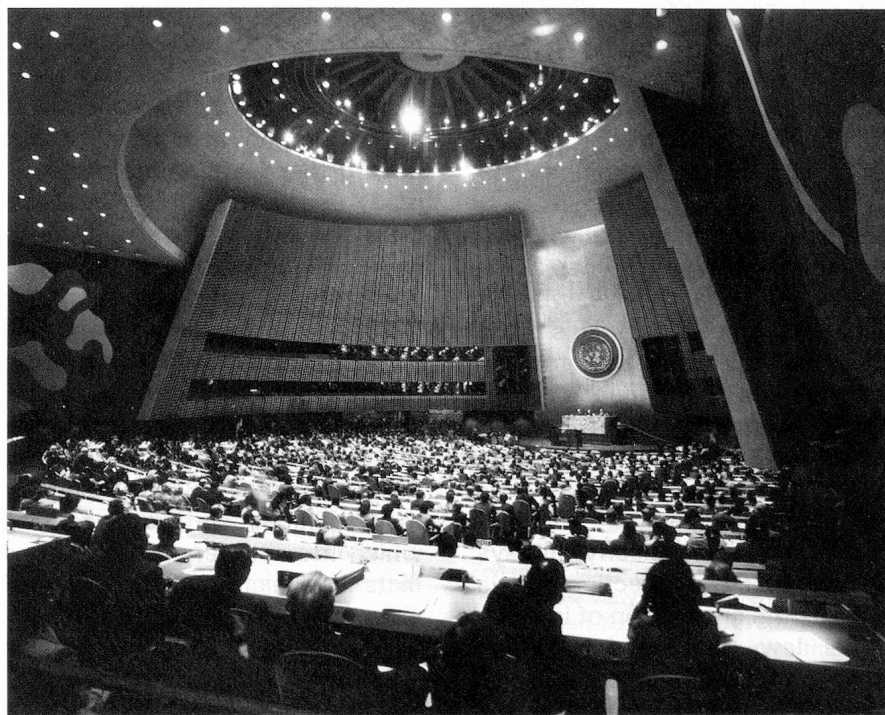
pendence. The primary objective of our foreign policy is thus to preserve Switzerland's existence as an independent state and to ensure that she is recognized as an equal member of the international community. The principal means of achieving this end are permanent and armed neutrality and a policy of solidarity with the community of nations.

In view of the growing interdependence of states, Switzerland must conceive her foreign policy in a worldwide framework and with a long-term perspective. That being said, the Federal Council wishes to reaffirm here with all possible clarity that Switzerland is determined to adhere to her permanent and armed neutrality in all circumstances and to uphold the traditional principles of her foreign policy. She will declare this explicitly before acceding to the UN.

More than 30 years' experience of the interpretation and application of the United Nations Charter

has shown that membership of the UN is compatible with **neutrality**. The examination of this question has been particularly concerned with the relationship between neutrality, the system of sanctions provided for in the Charter and Switzerland's policy at the UN. According to Chapter VII of the Charter, the Security Council can, in the event of a threat to peace, a breach of the peace or an act of aggression, order collective enforcement measures of a military or non-military nature. Such a decision requires the agreement of the five permanent members of the Security Council – China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States – each of which has a right of veto. There could be no question of Switzerland's participating in the military measures provided for in Article 42 of the Charter because this would be inconsistent with her right to neutrality. According to Article 43, however, no state can

UN General Assembly



be automatically compelled to take part in military sanctions; on the contrary, the Security Council must in every case conclude with the state concerned a special agreement, which is subject to ratification. Moreover, the Security Council has the power, under Article 48, to instruct only certain states to implement sanctions. Our country could therefore stand aloof from such sanctions, even as a member of the UN.

Law of Neutrality and the Policy of Neutrality

The situation is different in the case of the non-military sanctions provided for in Article 41. In principle, these are automatically obligatory for all the member states. But, in the great majority of cases, they have to be assessed from the point of view not of the right to neutrality, which is only applicable in the event of war, but of the policy of neutrality, whose execution is left to the discretion of the neutral state.

We have come to the conclusion that the question of the compatibility of non-military sanctions with our neutrality can be resolved. The «Message» gives concrete examples of how Switzerland, whether a member of the UN or not, is able to fulfill the obligations arising from her neutrality if non-military sanctions are decreed.

The policy of neutrality will, of course, affect the attitudes Switzerland adopts at the UN, without necessarily meaning – as is often assumed – that she has to take up a position of permanent abstention every time a political conflict arises. As she has already done many times at various conferences, Switzerland will express her opinion clearly, always basing herself on objective criteria such as the application of international law, respect for human rights and the fundamental values of our society, regard for the hu-

manitarian point of view and the elimination of political and social injustices. The essential thing is that our country should remain impartial – but not uncritical – and that when it takes up a position on important questions it should follow a steadfast and predictable line.

Furthermore, the neutral member states can render services to the organization precisely because of their neutrality. The example of those states shows clearly that if Switzerland were a member of the UN she would by no means have to limit her traditional activity of good offices; on the contrary, she would be able to develop it further.

Self-Interest – Solidarity towards Other Countries

If we wish to develop our foreign policy in accordance with its traditional principles, membership is a necessity. It will be at the same time a means of **defending our interests**, which are already – at the level of our bilateral relationships – based on the principle of universality, and a manifestation of **solidarity** with all other states in the search for solutions to common problems. In spite of its inadequacies and defects, the UN remains the only attempt on a world scale to establish a certain order among the states – there are already more than 160 – which form the international community, and as such it is indispensable. In the first place it is an instrument for checking and eliminating crises; it also serves as a forum for its members in which they can declare their attitudes to the big problems of the international community and express their opinions on the questions which interest them or on the conflicts in which they may be involved.

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Participation in international co-operation is the main element of

our policy of solidarity, for it testifies to our determination to bear our share of responsibility in world affairs. Like all other countries, therefore, Switzerland ought to contribute within the framework of the UN to the improvement of international relations and the solution of the fundamental problems of our age with a view to ensuring a safer and more dignified future.

Switzerland already participates, it is true, in numerous United Nations activities. She belongs to the specialized agencies, with the exception of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank group. She has acceded to the Statute of the International Court of Justice and plays her part in various subsidiary organs of the UN, which are principally occupied with economic and humanitarian questions and with multilateral cooperation for development. She attends United Nations conferences when they are open to non-member states. At the present time she is supporting peace-keeping operations through a financial contribution to the United Nations force stationed in Cyprus and by putting an aircraft at the disposal of UN observers in the Middle East. Switzerland has permanent observer missions at the UN in New York and Geneva.

But this policy is no longer sufficient. What Switzerland needs, and what only membership of the UN can give her, is full participation in the United Nations' permanent negotiating process, in which she is only partially involved today. The more intertwined the United Nations system becomes, and the more its various activities are interlinked, the more difficult it is for us to restrict ourselves to membership of a limited number of selected bodies if our work is to be effective in the long



UN Office at Geneva

term. It has become necessary to participate continuously in United Nations activities in order to follow problems through from beginning to end. We also need to be in a position to express our views and to push through the ideas in which we believe. By our voluntary absence from the UN we run the risk of an isolation which can only harm our interests. Reason therefore bids us play a full part in political, economic and social cooperation at the UN. In that way we shall be able to end the drawbacks arising from our present restricted participation in various fields. We shall be in a better position to defend our interests and to present our policies directly to the international community ourselves. That is especially important because we have always considered that active participation in international cooperation should go hand in hand with our determination to keep out of political conflicts between the Great Powers. Acces-

sion to the UN would prove definitively that Switzerland is capable of adapting to a changing world while continuing to respect and apply the principles of foreign policy to which she intends to remain as faithful as in the past.

The changes at the UN – particularly the fact that membership has become universal – and the experience it has acquired in applying the sanctions policy have removed the objective reasons why Switzerland could not join. Other countries would therefore not understand if we stayed out of the organization permanently.

The Federal Council realizes that Switzerland's long-term interests demand the normalization of our relations with all the world organizations, including the **Bretton Woods institutions** (International Monetary Fund and World Bank group). But accession to the UN does not automatically entail membership of those institutions. Before submitting a proposal on that subject to Parliament the

Federal Council would have to negotiate the entry conditions. The question of developing our relations with those institutions is being studied independently of the question of our accession to the UN.

The Federal Council hopes that the «Message» on Switzerland's accession to the UN will be an occasion for the whole Swiss people to reflect on the short-term and long-term problems facing Switzerland in the modern world and vis-à-vis the international community.

Financial consequences of Switzerland's accession to the UN

The member states' individual contribution rates are calculated according to a scale based on the gross national product. However, the General Assembly has fixed maximum and minimum contributions at 25 per cent and 0.01 per cent of the UN budget respectively.

According to the current scale, Switzerland would have to contribute **1.05 per cent** of the UN's costs, which would amount to about **15.7 million Swiss francs** for the year 1983. The sum includes the contributions Switzerland is already paying to the principal and subsidiary organs to which she belongs.

When considering the expenditure in which Switzerland would be involved as a member of the UN, it is important to remember the world organization's economic role for Switzerland: today the UN spends **30 per cent** of its budget in Switzerland. This amounts to about **360 million Swiss francs** per year. When the expenditure of the UN institutions established in Geneva is added, the sum rises to more than **850 million Swiss francs**.

Historical Survey

24th October 1945 Entry into force of the United Nations Charter of 26th June 1945.

1945 The Consultative Commission set up by the Federal Council and chaired by Federal Councillor Max Petitpierre expresses the view, on the strength of an experts' report dated 14th November 1945, that Switzerland should join the UN

(Continued on page 22)

provided the organization is prepared to recognize Swiss neutrality.

1946 The Federal Council gives up the idea of joining for the time being and at the same time draws up a three-point programme according to which Switzerland is to follow closely the activities of the United Nations, accede to the Statute of the International Court of Justice and to the specialized agencies and facilitate the establishment of the United Nations on her territory.

1965 Furgler's and Hubacher's «interpellation» concerning Switzerland's foreign policy (including her relations with the UN).

1966 In its report for 1965 the Federal Council adheres to its opinion that it is «its duty to continue to follow this question (of possible UN membership) closely». The National Council debate of 16th June 1966 on this passage gives Federal Councillor Spühler an opportunity to comment at length on the evolution of the United Nations during its 20 years' existence and on the possibility of Switzerland's becoming a member while maintaining her neutrality.

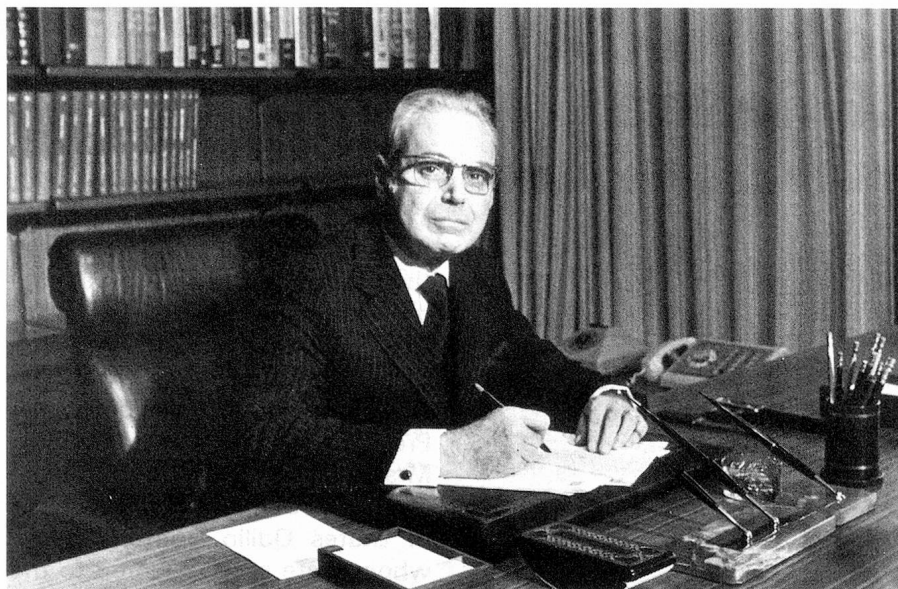
28th February 1967 Bretscher's proposal in the form of a «postulat» (co-signatories: Conzett, Dürrenmatt, Eggenberger and Furgler), in which the Federal Council is asked to report on our relations with the United Nations.

16th June 1969 Federal Council's report on Switzerland's relations with the United Nations (first UN report). The results of a detailed analysis show that Switzerland's accession to the UN would be possible and useful. Parliament accepts the Federal Council's proposal to report periodically on the activities of the UN and its specialized agencies.

17th November 1971 Federal Council's report on Switzerland's relations with the UN and its specialized agencies for the years 1969-71 (second UN report). The conclusions emphasize how important the United Nations' development towards universality is for our relations with it and, in this connexion, for our policy of neutrality. The Federal Council suggests setting up a consultative commission to examine this matter.

28th August 1973 The Federal Council decides to set up the Consultative Commission on Switzerland's relations with the UN. The tasks of this Commission, which comprises 50 members and is chaired by former States Councillor Eduard Zellweger, consist in giving «all interested circles and all strata of the population the opportunity to express themselves freely on the form our future relations with the United Nations might take.»

26th February 1976 The Commission delivers its report and two additional docu-



Javier Perez de Cuelhar, Secretary general of the UN.

ments reflecting minority opinions. On the instructions of the Federal Council this report is published on 29th June 1976. The great majority of the Commission is in favour of Switzerland's accession to the UN and puts forward as its main reason the universality practically acquired by the organization.

29th June 1977 The Federal Council's report on Switzerland's relations with the UN and its specialized agencies for the years 1972-76 (third UN report). The Federal Council concludes that Switzerland's accession to the UN is desirable. It expresses its intention of proposing to Parliament, in the not too distant future, that the matter be submitted to the people and the cantons, and states that it will present no further reports before the relevant «Message» is issued. The National Council takes note of this report and approves it on 5th December 1977. Furthermore, it expresses the wish that «the Federal Council, basing itself on the considerations and conclusions contained in the report, shall as soon as possible submit to Parliament, for the attention of the people and the cantons, a «Message» and a proposal concerning Switzerland's accession to the United Nations.» On 17th January 1978 the Council of States, in compliance with a suggestion from its Foreign Affairs Commission, approves the Federal Council's report.

28th March 1979 The Federal Council instructs the Department of Foreign Affairs to draft the «Message» concerning Switzerland's accession to the UN.

16th January 1980 The Federal Council states in its report on the Broad Outlines of government policy that the «Message» will appear during the legisla-

tive period 1979-83 and gives absolute priority within the framework of our foreign policy to the question of UN membership. This subject therefore figures among the main points of the current legislative period. In its interim report of 5th October 1981 the Federal Council again gives notice of the «Message» in question.

21st December 1981 The Federal Council approves the «Message» concerning Switzerland's accession to the United Nations (UN).

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