

**Zeitschrift:** Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad  
**Herausgeber:** Organisation of the Swiss Abroad  
**Band:** 12 (1985)  
**Heft:** 4

**Artikel:** Federal ballot of 16th March 1986 : What is the significance of joining the UN?  
**Autor:** Bütler, Hugo A.  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907721>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 17.04.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## What is the Significance of joining the UN?

**The controversy regarding Switzerland joining the UN is already heavily under way. – Dr. Hugo A. Bütler, Chief Editor of the 'Neue Zürcher Zeitung' describes what is at stake. – Furthermore, prominent persons state their opinions for-and-against Membership to the UN.**

What is at stake in the question of Switzerland joining the UN and what does it not imply? Firstly, to start with the negative, the membership of Switzerland to the UN is certainly *not a question of survival for the existence of our country*. Secondly, in the forthcoming Federal Ballot to be held next March in no case is Swiss Neutrality at stake. Neither the Federal Councillors nor the Swiss people are ready or disposed to giving up the most important and proven guiding principle in the maintenance of Independence and Sovereignty, the maxim of Neutrality of our country. Thirdly, in the case of an eventual UN membership, *a basic change in the Swiss foreign policy is not involved*, which apart from its Neutrality, is prepared to render services and solidarity through Universal relations to the community of Nations.

The being or not being of Switzerland does not depend on full membership to the UN. Whoever claims the opposite overestimates the role and the position of the UN and, at the same time, greatly underestimates the self-assertiveness and the vitality of the Swiss Confederation. *No Country*, which is a member of the UN, even no neutral country like Austria or Sweden, has thereby given up its Sovereignty or its *independent foreign policy*. On the other hand, a country like Switzerland can well continue to go on existing without being a full

member of the UN. The ballot on the 16th March, 1986, will not, one way or the other, be a decision of survival. By going to the polls, we need not have any unfounded fears regarding our future or about our political identity as a Nation to be guided by a freely chosen Federal system. It is more a question of a *wise Foreign policy* and a recognition of one's own opportunities in a world of Nations, which in the meantime are nearly all members of the UN.

Switzerland has already taken an active part, for a long time, in most of the special organisations of the UN and pays her dues



**Contra:**  
**Dr. Otto Fischer,**  
**FDP,**  
former National  
Councillor and  
former Director  
Swiss Gewerbe-  
verband, Bern

*The UN is a platform of international demagoguery against the West and a centre of Soviet espionage. Membership would be incompatible with our Neutrality. It would endanger our Independence and our Federal System.*

there, like other member States. Now, that the Federal Council and Parliament are proposing membership to the General Assembly and other political executive bodies of the UN, it is merely as a consequence of their position till

now, and the resulting experiences. The prevailing attitude could be described as taking part without the rights of a full membership. Experiences show that any further *staying away from* the main executive bodies has *disadvantages*, which are clearly greater than the advantages of



**Pro:**  
**Dr. Rudolf Friedrich,**  
**FDP,**  
former Federal  
Councillor and  
Attorney-at-Law,  
Winterthur

*Especially Neutral States have an important function within the UN. They act as Mediators between opposed Fronts to settle delicate questions. Neutrality would not be damaged by Accession to the UN, on the contrary, it would be more greatly valued.*

keeping aloof. It proves the proverbial saying where «Absence leads to Injustice».

### **Neutrality and the UN Charter**

When the Voters carefully consider the Pro's and Con's of an UN membership, they can rightfully ask the question whether Switzerland, as an UN member, can continue in her *Neutrality and its consequent political implications* without any changes. Both those for and against membership agree without exception that a membership only comes into question by retaining the permanent armed Neutrality. The discussion between them does not revolve around this basic conviction but around the question whether the obligations of the UN Charter are theoretically and practically compatible with the long practised art of Swiss neutrality. What can one say about this?

Firstly, Switzerland remains sovereign even as a full member; the

UN is not a world Government, rather a place for meetings and discussions, where conflicts reflect themselves. Whether and how, the problems can be solved, still remains always in the hands of the single Sovereign countries. Secondly, the UN Charter does not leave open the possibility of a formal declaration of Neutrality. Thirdly, for Switzerland it is in no way desirable to have an explicit recognition of the neutrality through the UN executive body, as has been demanded by some of the people opposing membership. It would be devious to demand official recognition of neutrality from the World Organisation to have the right to construe the same in the way one wants. Therefore, the politically correct way is a one-sided declaration of neutrality from the Government of the country at the time of joining.

Conflicts can theoretically arise for the neutral countries, when



**Contra:**  
**Louis Guisan,**  
**lib.,**  
former Councillor  
of States, former  
President CSA,  
Lausanne

*Switzerland has much to lose: her total Independence, which procures her everybody's confidence; and has nothing to gain because she has neither the force of arms nor the power of speech, which are the only voices heard at the General Assembly.*

the collective compulsory measures foreseen in the UN Charter come into use against a country, which has been accused of violating the Peace. In practice, these compulsory measures, particularly those of a military nature, have largely proven to be unrealistic and unfeasible. But as *Neutrals*, we cannot be forced to take

*part*, even if it were once so required, since the participation in a united military action requires a prior special treaty (according to Article 43 of the Charter) with the Security Council. Such a treaty must be ratified according to the constitutional law of the signatory. Switzerland would, therefore, retain a free hand. In exactly the same way, as an UN member, she would be free to set up or not the «blue helmets».

Switzerland can be confronted by more delicate questions regarding compulsory measures of a non-military nature, because the Security Council can put these into effect for the member countries without any prior special pact. Especially, when the sanctions are against a country at war, the participation is not in accordance with the right of neutrality. Such a case has not occurred until now in the forty years history of the UN – neither by the sanctions against Rhodesia (1966) nor by the arms embargo against South Africa (1977), where countries at war were involved.

However, this raises the question as to how the Federal Council, who is responsible for guiding the Foreign policy, would react in such cases. It has practically already pre-patterned the appropriate response with its policy regarding Rhodesia during the time of sanctions. In the interests of *credibility of our Neutrality*, the Federal Council at the time avoided being a party to the conflict for either side. Trade with Rhodesia was limited to the volume of the previous year, i.e. of the «Courant Normal». This neither put Rhodesia at a disadvantage, nor permitted that our country could be used to bypass the sanctions.

In other words, Switzerland sees herself as a member of the UN, confronted with the *same or similar political problems of Neutrality*, as until now as a *non-*

*member*. This holds true also for the voting process and the executive bodies of the UN. Switzerland has already today chosen of her own Sovereignty a politically neutral middle course in the executive bodies of the World Organisations, (e.g. UNESCO), in the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) or by sanctions of the European Community. This would remain the responsibility and duty of our authorities, even if we fully become a member of the UN.



**Pro:**  
**Flavio Cotti,**  
**CVP,**  
National Councilor,  
Attorney-at-Law  
and Notary,  
Locarno

*We can render our policy of armed Neutrality more credible and more comprehensible. Moreover, strategic-economic reasons also point in this direction. It will be easier for us to cultivate and maintain our world-wide connections.*

#### **Why become a Member?**

Why is membership recommended? In a few words because Switzerland, as a neutral country with world-wide economic involvement and universal political relations, has her standpoint and is aware of her political concerns and her economic interests everywhere, should also be represented in the discussions Forum of the UN. Since the UN has given up its role as a coalition of Victors in the last world war and has become a universal gathering of countries, the former role of mediator by Switzerland outside the UN has largely lost its meaning. We have to represent and introduce our political views, and our services where opinions are formed, where agreements are

Continuation page 20

However, the difficult years of uncertainty were in no way at an end.

The persistent differences within the SRG regarding the meaning, purpose and organisational structure and the financing of their own international radio transmissions, belonged to the manifestations that characterised the entire development phase of our national broadcasting service.

### Inform, but how to Finance?

In the beginning of the sixties, the independent news organisation of the Radio had to make a beginning in the short-wave region, at a time, when the interest in the short-wave services had a new revival because of the new tensions of de-colonisation and the cold war. And in this context, emerged again the controversial question: «Who should pay? The Confederation? The SRG subscribers?» Mr. Gerd H. Padel, the successor of Mr. Paul Borsinger in the administration of SRI and the author of this article, has from the start advocated in collaboration with the National Councillor Mr. Conzett – to make it possible to finance the programs for abroad through subventions from the Confederation, without having to give up the freedom and independence of



The English Service in action.  
(Photos: RSI)

production of the programs. The Parliament granted a special yearly credit for extra-ordinary tasks of the short-wave services. An important component of the expansion, thereby made possible, was the formation of the SRG's first own radio news editorship. This 24-hour service and the English editor-ship enabled the SRG, after years, to make a decisive break-through towards total independence in 1962.

If credibility should be and must be the objective of every endeavor

of its policy of information, then these efforts should be so oriented as to conform with the Report of the Federal Council, regarding the policy of security of Switzerland. This contains the key-phrase: «To maintain the confidence of the people... our policy of information should be based on truthfulness. Manipulated information, which conceals or extenuates setbacks and negative developments, have in the long run the opposite effect to what was meant to be achieved.» In the very intensely competitive field of international radio, where propaganda is the rule and uncoloured information the exception, lies the biggest chance for the transmissions of a small neutral country. This can, indeed, only then be realised, when one is ready to also hold one's own technically, in the face of hard competition. ●

---

Continuation from page 7

reached for relations between countries, where the further development of International Law can today be determined «de facto».

Joining the UN, therefore, does not mean saying goodbye to the special case of Switzerland. It does *not mean losing our Identity and our own Free Will*. The meaning of membership lies much more in actively maintaining the special position of Switzerland on the world stage and safeguarding her right of existence, also under changed circumstances in her own well understood interest and as a reliable partner in the Community of Nations.

At stake is not the Independence, not the Federal System, not the Sovereignty of Switzerland, but at stake is how we maintain our own Swiss values and interests in the world most wisely and effectively. ●

#### To all Swiss abroad.

At the beginning of this year, the SRI has decided on a few innovations in the area of her structure and her broadcasting: more stress on information, more reasonable broadcasting times for the overseas areas, introduction of special programs for Europe with repetition of transmissions of our national radio stations. The SRI is, therefore, very interested in learning the opinion of the Swiss abroad regarding the programs, the timing and the quality of the frequencies. It wishes also to make known to the Swiss abroad, that its programs can even be heard over the stations in the different guest countries. Radio stations abroad, which regularly transmit Swiss programs are supplied with transcriptions directly from the SRI.

The SRI does not wish, however, to limit itself. There are certainly several other radio stations, which transmit Swiss programs or produce broadcasts dedicated to the immigrants, which, however, may be unaware of the existence of this new service. It may also be possible that this new service would encourage the Swiss abroad, to produce their own programs, which could then later be followed up by transmission over local stations.

The SRI therefore appeals to all Swiss abroad and asks them, to notify her which transmitter could be interested. Please write to:

Schweizer Radio International, CH-3000 Bern 15.