

An Editor speaks

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AN EDITOR SPEAKS.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"Switzerland and integrated Europe".

The European Common Market, grouping six countries of our Continent, has just come into force. It has made an economic unit of these countries, which represent more than half of the industrial power of Europe. Furthermore, negotiations with a view to the establishment of a Free Trade Area — to which would adhere not only the group comprising these six countries, but also the eleven other States of Western Europe — are advancing very rapidly. Thus, Switzerland finds placed before her decisions of capital import. Should she, and can she, take part in the Common Market? Or should she, and can she, belong to the Free Trade Area? These are two questions of primary interest which will have to be answered by our country in the not-too-distant future.

There has now been talk about European integration for more than ten years. The idea was first started with the object of improving the economic situation of our Continent, which had been ruined by the war, and also because it was considered to be indispensable that Europe should be strengthened politically and made into a third autonomous unit, between the Soviet bloc and the American bloc. Certain realisations in this sense have already been achieved; for instance, the European Coal and Steel Community is now a reality, and, even if the project of a European Defence Community failed, the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation has rendered the most eminent services, in the sense that it has contributed, to a very large extent, to the liberalisation of foreign trade and to the lowering of customs barriers.

But these realisations are too limited, for, whereas economic expansion is making spectacular progress in the United States and in the Soviet world, Europe is not developing at the same rate. In fact, by reason of its divisions, it runs the risk of remaining dangerously behind. At the hour of automation and of the peaceful utilisation of nuclear power, it is forced to organise itself into an autonomous entity, all the members of which will place their resources in common.

One asks oneself, therefore, what attitude Switzerland can and should adopt, in view of these attempts at integration.

One thing is quite clear: Switzerland cannot, on any pretext, become the seventh member of the Common Market. Such an adherence would oblige her to sacrifice some of her sovereignty, because the members of the Common Market transfer part of their sovereign rights to a supra-national authority. A renouncement of this kind would be all the more incompatible with our traditional neutrality, in that the economic organisation of these six coincides with a political grouping and a military alliance. Moreover, such an adherence would presuppose that Switzerland would no longer be mistress of her Customs Tariff, even in relation to the non-European countries, when she imports nearly half of her foodstuffs from America and Asia, and also exports to these two Continents nearly one-half of her industrial production. She would be deprived of all liberty of movement in the field of her commercial policy.

The question regarding the Free Trade Area,

which is to group together, in addition to the six of the Common Market, eleven other countries belonging to the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation, presents a totally different aspect. Here, there is no question of any supra-national authority; it is simply a matter of forming an association of seventeen countries which intend to promote favourable conditions for foreign trade activities among themselves while, at the same time, remaining free to engage, in full liberty and autonomy, in business dealings with those countries which are not members of this organisation.

Switzerland has always practised a very liberal commercial policy and has always been ready to open her doors wide — when reciprocity was assured, of course. If other countries are getting together with the object of abolishing the obstacles which hamper international trade, set up by directivism, Switzerland is ready to join this movement, and to encourage others who are still hesitating.

There are still some obstacles of a technical nature which stand in the way of this adherence, but our negotiators are nevertheless already engaged in collaborating with the representatives of the members of the future Free Trade Area, in order to find a solution of these problems. This they are doing all the more willingly as the Free Trade Area will in no way constitute an attempt at setting up an autarchy on a European scale. On the contrary, if this attempt should succeed, it may be hoped that the Free Trade Area will constitute the embryo of a World Free Trade Area. To establish the freedom of international trade on a European plane, with the will to get it accepted on a much larger plane, is a task with which it is Switzerland's duty to associate herself.

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