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The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER.

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain

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DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

On 18th April 1961 the Vienna Agreement on Diplomatic Relations was arrived at. The message in which the Federal Council commended it to Parliament for acceptance a few weeks ago recalls that Switzerland had always had a part to play in the efforts of consolidating and developing the Law of Nations. Switzerland had been greatly interested in the decision of the United Nations to codify a further chapter of International Law as it concerned diplomacy. The setting up of an International Labour Office, the League of Nations, and after the second World War the establishment of European Headquarters of the United Nations and several other inter-state organisations in Geneva had indeed created vast problems with regard to immunity and privileges of these bodies and their officials, as well as the temporary or permanent representatives of their countries. Switzerland had thus been in a position to collect much valuable experience in the field of established International Law.

It was therefore of great importance that Switzerland could take part in the conference whose task it was to fix by an agreement the regulations concerning diplomatic relations and immunities.

The conference in Vienna had been permeated by a spirit of mutual understanding. The negotiations had been facilitated by the technical character of the subject and consequent lack of ideological issues. The only political incidents could be traced to the fact that some non-members of the U.N., like the People's Republic of China, Outer Mongolia, East Germany, North Korea and North Vietnam, had not been invited to the conference. But these complaints had been of no significance and had not influenced the negotiations. Generally speaking the delegations had been determined to evade political issues.

The Swiss delegation, led by Dr. R. L. Bindschedler, Chief Legal Adviser to the Head of the Political Department, had taken an active part in the work of the conference. Dr. Bindschedler had been one of eleven members of the drafting committee and thus Switzerland had been able to exercise some considerable influence on the final formulation of the agreement.

Thirty-seven countries had signed the convention. This codified rules and regulations established by usage in the field of diplomatic relations, immunities and privileges. Most countries had been anxious not to upset the equilibrium regarding the privileged position of diplomats which had been reached by the U.N. Commission on International Law.

The conference had also accepted two optional drafts, one concerning the acquisition of the nationality of the country to which a mission was accredited, the other affecting the compulsory shelving of disputes.

The Federal Council concluded its message by stressing that the results of the Vienna agreement could be considered satisfactory and had been accepted unanimously, with only Tunisia abstaining. This convention represents an important event in the history of codifying the Law of Nations. The codification of diplomatic rights in the Vienna treaty of 19th March 1815 and the Aachen "Protokoll" of 21st November 1818 had been very fragmentary. The agreement of 18th April 1961 was the first multilateral attempt to fix systematically all norms and standards which had established themselves in international diplomatic relations. Immunities and privileges were necessary to carry out successfully any diplomatic activity.

Some of the regulations deviated slightly from the practice adhered to in Switzerland. But some compromise was necessary, and none of the thirty-seven signatories could maintain that the convention was entirely to his country's liking. For each country it was a question of determining whether the price was worth the gain, and for Switzerland it could be said that the cost was minute considering the advantages. This was particularly true of the harmonious solution of the difficult problem of balance between the conflicting interests of a country which was both sender and receiver of missions.

* * *

Early in April figures were published relating to Switzerland's diplomatic relations with other states. In 1962 Switzerland maintained 56 Embassies, 8 Legations, 2 Delegations (Berlin and OECD), 1 Bureau of Switzerland's Observer at United Nations, 1 Mission with the European Communities, 37 Consulates-General, 60 Consulates and 1 Vice-Consulate. 32 out of the 98 consular posts were filled by Honorary Representatives. In addition, the Swiss Foreign Office counted 75 Consular Agencies. The Chiefs of the Embassies and Legations were accredited to a total of 92 states.

At the end of 1962, 76 countries had established diplomatic missions in Switzerland, of which 58 were Embassies and 18 Legations. 17 of these were resident abroad. The Diplomatic Corps consisted of 362 (1961: 322) diplomats, 502 chancery officials were on the roll and 182 consular representations were established in Switzerland.

During 1962 the Federal Political Department represented the interests of 11 countries in 7 states: that of Roumania in Spain (since 1946), of the Philippines in Bulgaria, of France in the United Arab Republic and Irak, of Irak in France, of Iran in Israel, of the USA in Cuba, of Belgium and Turkey in the United Arab Republic, of Togo in Nigeria, and finally of Argentina and Guatemala in Cuba.

Forty functionaries of the Swiss Foreign Office were employed exclusively in the task of looking after foreign interests. It created extra work for Embassies and Legations, specially those in Cairo and Havana. In the United Arab Republic the newly introduced measures created many legal problems, especially in connection with the considerable Turkish claims.

The Swiss Embassy in Cuba was able to visit the American political prisoners and to help them by sending food parcels and medical supplies. Most American residents in Cuba had decided to return to the USA last October, and the Swiss Embassy in Havana organised their repatriation.

An interesting figure was published in connection with the officials and employees of international organisations in Switzerland. In 1962 the number increased by 700 to 5,700. Of these 1,500 are Swiss citizens. Last year 59 permanent delegations and observer-missions were accredited to the European Headquarters of the United Nations. It can well be imagined the sort of administrative problems this causes Switzerland.

(Based on reports and news received by courtesy of the Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

COMMUNICATIONS AND CULTURE

On 14th March the 33rd International Motor Show opened in Geneva in the presence of Federal Councillor Spuehler, representatives of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps, the Army, and high political and juridical personalities. The Chairman of the *Salon*, Mr. Roger Perrot, pointed out that in 1947 305 exhibitors had taken part and 185,000 visitors had come. This year 1,112 exhibitors from twenty countries participated. A new exhibition hall was badly needed. On the other hand the Chairman expressed satisfaction that the Swiss roads were at last being improved, though not as fast as desirable. He praised the new traffic regulations.

Federal Councillor Spuehler, as Minister for Railways and Postal Services, referred to the motor-car as symbol of the affluent society and talked about the problem of managing surplus wealth whilst in the developing countries it was still the old problem of how to overcome poverty and shortages. He pointed out that in Switzerland 25 milliards were invested in communications at the end of 1960, of which road communications alone accounted for 17 milliards, i.e. roads, garages, parking facilities, petrol stations and cars. Expenditure for motor traffic amounted to four times that used up by rail traffic. Federal Councillor Spuehler also announced that a new building programme would shortly be implemented, according to which the last alpine pass roads should be made dust-free. He also touched on the negative aspects of noise, air pollution and accidents. He concluded by putting the question whether we should not have to correct the present tendency by which our economic standards have pushed non-material values into the background. Thus, communications could become directly or indirectly a cultural factor of the first order.

(Based on reports received by A.T.S.)

NEW SWISS VILLAGES

A new village is to be built in the canton of the Valais, at the north entrance to the Great St. Bernard road tunnel. All the northern installations of the tunnel are concentrated at this spot: a 66,000-square-foot covered road station, housing the Italian and Swiss customs offices and checkpoints as well as offices for the tunnel staff, who will also be provided with accommodation in the village; in addition there will be a station buffet, probably a hotel and a garage as well as the lower station of an aerial cableway. This new village, which will be extremely busy with all the international road traffic passing through, is to be called Bourg-St. Bernard.

Molésou-Village is the name of a new tourist and winter sports resort to be built in Gruyère, with the backing of the local authorities, by a company which intends to build a model village there right from scratch, according to a carefully prepared overall plan. This new village, situated in an as yet undeveloped part of the Fribourg Fore-Alps at an altitude of 3,600 feet, at the foot of the Molésou, will comprise separate zones for the hotels, private chalets and camping ground, and is to be completely equipped with all the necessary installations and facilities: water supply, sewerage system, car parks, forest paths for walkers, a church, post office, restaurant, bank, shopping centre, swimming pool, sports ground, wide approach roads and two aerial cableways for skiers. Attractive terms will be offered those wishing to build a chalet in this beautiful district with its excellent ski-ing possibilities, provided of course their plans comply with the overall architectural plan laid down for the village.

[O.S.E.C.]

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