

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1964)

Heft: 1459

Artikel: United Nations Conference on trade and development

Autor: [s.n.]

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-695113>

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The Swiss Observer

10009
FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER.

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain

Advisory Council: R. J. KELLER (Chairman), GOTTFRIED KELLER (Vice-Chairman), DR. E. M. BIRCHER, O. F. BOEHRINGER, J. EUSEBIO, A. KUNZ, A. STAUFFER, G. E. SUTER

EDITED BY MRS. MARIANN MEIER WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE SWISS COLONY IN GREAT BRITAIN

Telephone: CLERKENWELL 2321/2.

Published Twice Monthly at 23, LEONARD STREET, E.C.2.

Telegrams: FREPRINCO, LONDON.

Vol. 50. No. 1459

FRIDAY, 24th JULY 1964

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

On 23rd March, the largest conference ever held on political/economic matters opened in Geneva, the United Nations Trade and Development Conference. One hundred and twenty nations took part, and the aims were to find ways and means of how to bridge the trade gap between the minority of twenty "rich" Western industrialised countries and seventy-seven "poor" nations in the course of development, mainly in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The conference sat for three months, and it formally closed on 16th June. Readers may wish to refer to the talk on "The Economic Plight of the Underdeveloped Countries" by Monsieur M. Heimo, and published in the issue of the "Swiss Observer" of 12th June.

The daily press has reported on the deliberations and conclusions. We shall limit ourselves to a few details with special reference to Switzerland.

The Swiss delegation consisted of ten members and fifteen advisers. It must be stated, however, that this is the total, and only a few at a time were actually in Geneva, for obviously it would have been impossible for delegates to attend continuously for three months. In addition, there were five special commissions sitting at the same time. The delegation was lead by Federal Councillor H. Schaffner, Swiss Foreign Minister, and his deputies were Minister Weitnauer, Delegate for trade agreements, and Dr. E. Moser, Deputy Director of the Commercial Section of the Federal Political Department.

U. Thant, Secretary-General of the United Nations, opened the conference in March, and one of the speakers at the opening ceremony was Federal Councillor von Moos, President of the Swiss Confederation. He bade an official welcome to the delegates and stressed the importance of the deliberations which were about to begin. He referred to the three methods of improving economic relations between the industrialised countries and those in the course of development. The first was technical assistance, the second economic and financial help and the third improved trade. He wished the conference every success, that this undertaking of solidarity should triumph over the complexity of the problems.

Two days later, the head of the Swiss delegation, Federal Councillor Schaffner, addressed the plenary meeting. He began by describing the hard road that Switzerland, once herself an underdeveloped country, had to go until it reached the present high standard. Therefore, there was much understanding in Switzerland of the problems facing the developing countries. He expressed his country's conviction that the plans for the Kennedy Round as formulated by the GATT Ministerial Conference in May 1963 should be adhered to absolutely. It would be wrong to consider them of no use to the underdeveloped countries. He ended his speech by reminding the assembly

that technical and financial aid were not enough. The most important thing for true co-operation was mutual trust built on human values.

On 22nd April, the Swiss delegation made a statement regarding Switzerland's attitude which was against preferential treatment and advocated non-discriminating opening of the markets by the industrial nations as the best solution. This would provide the developing countries with the chance of competing. Switzerland proposed regional preferences between the developing countries themselves. These would usefully complement the concrete programme which Switzerland had worked out for the sector of manufactured goods and semi-manufactured goods.

Towards the end of the conference, Federal Councillor Schaffner opened the general debate on 11th June. He wondered whether the conference had really made the best of its opportunities. He appealed to the developing countries not to underestimate the results. Next he asked the industrial nations to realise that the *status quo* could not continue. A new situation, a new international distribution of economic activity would develop. From the experiences of his own small country, Switzerland, which also has to fight for a better position in the world of international economy, he knew that there was room for everyone to develop if we really started proper planning in all countries. He considered that the conference had been enlightened as to the needs of the developing countries, but much more was required to realise their wishes. Switzerland had come to the conference ready to help. She would support the developing countries where they ask for a just and realistic treatment of their requirements. Switzerland would also co-operate with the industrial countries in order to find the best possible answers to certain questions, as well as with any organisation which the conference had to create for the future.

Switzerland is one of the eighteen Western countries on the new permanent Council of the Conference, together with nine countries from Latin America, six nations of the Eastern Bloc, ten from Asia and twelve from Africa, fifty-five in all. Switzerland also signed the declaration at the end of the conference.

The full conference will meet again in 1966, and the permanent Council will carry on business in between conferences. The United Nations Organisation has been given power to act in a field which hitherto lay outside its activities: trade and development. In spite of dark clouds which at times overshadowed the work of the conference, a basis has been created by the three international economic groups (industrialised West, East Bloc and developing countries) which may help towards friendly co-existence, the problem of our century.

(News by courtesy of Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)