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The Swiss Observer

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SWITZERLAND IN EUROPE

In a leading article in the "Basler Nachrichten" last June, Peter Dürrenmatt said that three main groups of problems concerning European integration would have to be solved: The Common Market would have to sort things out amongst its own members, the so-called "Kennedy Round" (which had started with the GATT Conference in Geneva) would have to be brought to an end, and political stability within individual EEC states would have to prove its staying power.

In May, the Ministerial Council of EFTA (European Free Trade Association) met in Lisbon. Switzerland's representatives were Federal Councillor Wahlen, Swiss Foreign Minister, and Federal Councillor Schaffner, Minister for Economic Affairs; Ambassador Stopper, Director of the Commercial Section of the Federal Department of Public Economy, Minister Jolles, Chief of the Swiss Office for Integration, Minister Long, Swiss delegate at the EFTA Secretariat in Geneva, as well as two other members of the Commercial Section.

There were big difficulties, but finally the conference ended in success. The main achievement was the time table for the reduction in customs tariffs for industrial goods.

No sooner was the EFTA meeting over, than ministers from 75 states belonging to GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) met in Geneva. GATT takes the place of a world-wide trade organisation because so far no agreement as to the formation of such a body could be reached. GATT is therefore the only forum where commercial problems affecting the free nations can be discussed effectively. There are three problems which face world trade. Firstly, measures must be taken to reduce existing customs tariffs with a view to liberalising trade. Secondly, ways and means must be found to give agricultural produce access to the world markets; thirdly, measures must be taken to help developing countries in their efforts to partake in world trade.

At the Geneva meeting Federal Councillor Schaffner was elected Chairman of the conference. The integration policy of the Federal Council has been from the very beginning in favour of a larger free trade zone. The world knows now that the Europe-problem can only be solved on an all-European basis. The fact that Federal Councillor Schaffner was elected Chairman was proof that the Swiss policy was generally considered the right one.

A great compliment was paid to Federal Councillor Schaffner's activities as intermediary between U.S.A. and the Six (whose fundamental differences prevented a solution of the customs problems). Mr. Christian Herter, the

U.S.A. leader, proposed a vote of thanks to Federal Councillor Schaffner and led the ovation by the 750 representatives.

Bundesrat Schaffner himself called the meeting "no victory, no defeat, but a rare result of such a conference — a diplomatic success".

In June the Consultative Council of EFTA held its fifth meeting in Lisbon. The Swiss delegation was led by Dr. Homberger, delegate of the Swiss Federation of Trade and Industry.

Early in July there was a second series of informal talks between Germany and Switzerland in Schaffhausen, regarding EEC (European Economic Community) and military defence. The parties were agreed that the federalistic experiences of Switzerland and Germany would be of essential value for the future security of Europe.

In September, a ministerial conference of EFTA took place in Stockholm and Helsinki. Federal Councillor Schaffner once again headed the Swiss delegation. This meeting served mainly for discussions on general problems of European integration. The Consultative Committee met in Stockholm in October, when the EFTA annual report was considered and the committee's tasks were discussed. The Swiss delegation was again led by Dr. Homberger. The possibility of extending co-operation of member states with EEC countries was studied.

In October, Federal Councillor Tschudi led the Swiss delegation at a conference of OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) on science policy in Paris. The conference dealt with the questions of national and international politics in science and the influence of scientific research on economic development.

In November, Geneva was the venue of the first meeting of the EFTA Committee on economic development, a body which had been formed in Lisbon. Delegates from Austria, Sweden, Great Britain, Denmark, Norway, Portugal and Switzerland took part. Regional development and the general position since the collapse of the Brussels negotiations were studied. The chairmanship was given to the Swiss leader, Minister Long.

On 15th November a Portuguese-Swiss commission, which had been set up in March 1962 to study economic co-operation between the two countries within EFTA, met for the first time in Berne. Its terms of reference cover industrial, commercial and tourist relations which should be encouraged by contacts with private undertakings.

"For a Europe without Frontiers" is the title of the travelling exhibition of the Council of Europe which arrived in Basle in November (Kunstthalle).

Also in November, Federal Councillor Schaffner, leading a Swiss delegation, attended an OECD conference of Ministers in Paris. And in December the first meeting of the consultative co-ordinating commission for cultural questions in connection with the Council of Europe took place in Berne. Minister Burckhardt, Chief of the Section for international organisations of the Federal Political Department, was in the chair. Many organisations were represented, educational and cultural, the Federal Department for Economic Affairs, the National UNESCO Commission, BIGA (Federal Office for Trade and Labour), the foundation "Pro Helvetia", and the permanent representative with the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, Minister Voirier, attended. A wide range of subjects was discussed on extended cultural co-ordination and better information of the public.

At the same time, the Ministerial Executive of the Council of Europe met in Paris for its thirty-third ordinary meeting. The Foreign Ministers of seventeen member states were present, amongst them Federal Councillor Wahlen as head of the Swiss delegation.

The Bernese group of the European Union organised round table talks in Berne "Switzerland in a changed Europe". The basic questions of Switzerland's relationship with the Common Market and that between Europe and U.S.A. were analysed. One of the speakers was Minister Weitnauer, delegate for trade agreements in the Commercial Section of the Federal Department of Public Economy. He reproached the Common Market countries, but also the European Union, that they often usurped the term "Europe" to serve their own aims. One should not forget that the world consisted of three main groups: 1) the West, including Europe, the U.S.A. and Canada, all with highly developed industries and civilisation, 2) the Communist Bloc and 3) the developing countries. Switzerland, he said, held a special position in the first group, based on her sovereignty and neutrality. Minister Weitnauer stressed the fact that the Swiss is pragmatic and not an idealist, and from this angle he saw a solution for many problems. Much had been done recently, and for the first time since the days of the League of Nations Switzerland belonged again to an international body.

On 22nd December, GATT published a 200-page report on international trade in 1962. It revealed a further increase in trade, the world exports (except the special exports from U.S.A.) had gone up by seven milliards of dollars. 1962 saw an increase of world production by 6%. The total exports from the Western European countries increased by 5%. In EEC countries the increase was 6%, in EFTA countries 5%. European Free Trade Association imports also showed an increase of 5%.

In 1963 the EFTA Council met forty-one times. Determined efforts resulted in a decision that EFTA states should speak up as one body in the Council of Europe. Customs tariffs in general had been reduced by 10%. A further strengthening of relations between EFTA and Finland was noted.

On 1st January, for the first six months of the year, Federal Councillor Schaffner took over the chairmanship of the EFTA Council on ministerial level. He gave a new year's message in which he referred to the four years of EFTA activities and more especially to the successes in 1963. Within the Free Trade Zone customs had already been reduced by 60%, and in three years they would have disappeared completely. The liberal policy of EFTA towards the rest of the countries would continue, and he

was looking forward to a harmonious development of relations and of trade between the member states. The new year would witness how they would all partake in the great task of liberalising trade within the negotiations of the "Kennedy Round" of GATT, and the conference of the United Nations on trade and development.

On 13th and 14th February, the Council of EFTA met in Geneva under the chairmanship of Federal Councillor Schaffner. The Ministers reviewed all the happenings within the aims of EFTA, and they discussed worldwide trade problems and questions of the interior structure of the Association. The Ministers agreed that the continuation of the "Kennedy Round" in GATT was the most important immediate problem. They considered this a unique chance to open up the markets of the world and to increase export results of the industrial as well as the developing countries. The next meeting of the EFTA Council will take place in Edinburgh in July.

GATT began the twenty-first session of its members in Geneva on 24th February. It will last until 20th March, the eve of the world trade conference. The "Kennedy Round" will start in May.

In a recent article in the "Financial Times", Federal Councillor Schaffner said that the process of European integration confronted Switzerland with two issues: to retain and promote the many-fold economic relations and interdependence as evidenced by the high level of goods and services exchanged between the countries of Europe and with the world at large, and to maintain a policy of neutrality and independence of the country under changing circumstances. He said that both requirements represented basic aspects of Swiss trade and foreign policy, and that they had to prove themselves anew in an integrating Europe. He said that the positive development of economic relations between Switzerland and Britain was a tangible proof of the fact that EFTA methods were successful. He also referred to the danger of Switzerland losing EEC markets which took two-fifths of Swiss exports. These, therefore, had to remain competitive.

Both the parliamentary correspondent of the "Basler Nachrichten" (20th September) and National Councillor W. Bretscher in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" (20th October) said that Switzerland and the other EFTA countries were at present "in the waiting room of integration". But like the tree that has been forgotten blooms, so it is with the waiting countries: "EFTA has become a flourishing undertaking" says the parliamentary correspondent. Without a special apparatus — compared with the bureaucracy of the EEC organisation its administrative requirements are very modest — the partners have managed to remove the barriers between them. Switzerland's contribution in this has been and will be considerable. Never could it have played this important part if it had not followed its own conception of a possible integration policy right from the beginning.

In 1964 Swiss foreign policy will again be influenced by the developments in the field of integration. The fact that the difficulties within the Common Market have increased the value of EFTA should not lead to an over-estimation of the latter. Continued vigilance, wisdom and hard work will be required. Whether the three problems Peter Dürrenmatt mentioned and which have been quoted at the beginning of this article will find a solution in the new year, remains to be seen.

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