

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: - (1965)
Heft: 1479

Artikel: "The state of the Confederation" [concluded]
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-692141>

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: 26.07.2025

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

The other date, the year 1848, is the moment when Switzerland got its first Federal Constitution, when a national government was set up, when a national administration, economic policy and soon also national laws were established — when Switzerland became a State.

But what happened in that half century between 1798 and 1849? It was, generally speaking, a period of struggle between federalist and nationalist forces, between separatist and unionist tendencies. It was a period of swaying to and fro between the pole of complete unity and that of complete disorganisation. In 1798, the pendulum swung from one extreme straight to the other: The French invaders forced Switzerland into a strictly centralised political system. The country was called "Switzerland" no more, but "the one and indivisible Helvetic Republic". This system, however, could not work. Not only was it not a naturally grown unit, but it was imposed by military force and was nothing else than a sheer imitation of the French model. This system of a Swiss state, therefore, was shattered by revolts and opposition before it had even started to work. Then, after the period of French domination was over, the pendulum swung back. The period which followed was characterised by the term "Restoration". And indeed, also the loose federation of

Switzerland was restored and found itself in a position similar to that before 1798 with no common government, strong preponderance of cantonal power and customs barriers between single Cantons.

The following period could be called a period of fermentation. Those who wanted to unite Switzerland were restless. More and more, their political discontent was seething in their minds. Finally, a minority of Cantons decided to join in the movement for a common national state. This endeavour to transform this desire into political reality by means of constitutional reform failed, because there remained a minority refusing to participate in a common political unit and wishing to keep the traditional order of cantonal sovereignty. In order to unite Switzerland in spite of this minority of Cantons, it was necessary to use violence and to force those reluctant Cantons into the new Federal State. This event is known as the "Sonderbund" war, and its immediate result was the draft of the Federal Constitution of 1848 — the modern Swiss State was born.

This rough outline is the historical context in which the Swiss sense of national unity has to be seen.

(To be continued.)

"THE STATE OF THE CONFEDERATION"

THE FEDERAL COUNCIL REPORTS

(Concluded)

State Economy

The demand for restricting expenditure by the State was repeatedly made during the discussions regarding measures for slowing down the excessive economic growth. State expenditure should not grow any faster than the income of the people. But this demand can only be met as long as no new priorities with financial consequences are given to the State, unless other tasks are taken away from it.

The Federal Council states that the accounts have been favourable during the last few years with the result that there were no expansive effects. However, the necessity to catch up with modern demands in public services has led to deficits in some of the Cantons and Communes and has forced them to take up credits or increase taxes. The Confederation, too, will have to study a long term finance plan which will take into consideration the drop in customs revenue and the increased cost of the above-mentioned new tasks. This planning will have to include an extensive analysis of federal subsidies.

Defence

Questions of military armament were in the centre of discussions regarding national defence during 1964. As war techniques have progressed at an increasingly fast rate, the securing of arms has been confronted with most difficult problems. Thus was shown particularly in the introduction of the new aeroplane type "Mirage".

In the conception of defence and the planning of armament needs, modern warfare and weapons, the specific characteristics of our country, the militia system and the nature of the territory have to be considered. Limited financial means have to be taken into account and the abilities of Swiss arms manufacturing concerns. New techniques are being studied, also regarding the training of our Army. Modern arms and strategy necessitate the acquisition by the Confederation of special territory, which

meets with difficulties at a time of a generally thriving economy.

Planning of military defence has to go hand in hand with civil defence and economic provisioning in case of war. National defence used to be the main task of the Confederation. In recent times, a number of other important duties have been added. Nevertheless, even today, the sums needed for an adequate defence system are the most important items in federal finance. As in other fields of federal activities, it is important in defence policy to find a best possible and adequate form for a small neutral country to hold her own.

* * *

The report by the Federal Council has generally been approved. The question has been asked why the Federal Council was unwilling to make such an *exposé* earlier. No sensational revelations were made, nor unknown details given. But the report is acknowledged as an excellent means of giving the public much-needed information, and if it serves as a basis of discussion it will be a good thing. There has been some criticism of too carefully considered accents on controversial subjects. As one paper put it, the Federal Council should by now realise that "one cannot wash the skin without wetting it". Peter Dürrenmatt, Editor-in-Chief of the "Basler Nachrichten", wrote on 10th April that evolution in Switzerland happened in slow-motion tempo, but that the Switzerland of 1965 was nevertheless no longer the Switzerland of 1945: the mentality of the people had changed, the reputation of the country was different, and the position held by the "Bund", the general term for Government and federal authorities, was no longer the same as then. Such happenings as the "Mirage" affair and the problem of too many foreigners had suddenly and forcefully made the people realise the changes, and, together with other happenings, had started the discussion of State Reform. This would be debated in Parliament in June.

Mr. Dürrenmatt referred to the first demand for a political report on the state of the Confederation, made several years ago by the Geneva Liberal Councillor of States Victor Gauthier. Strangely enough, by making such a report, the Federal Council actually followed the demand as laid down in the Federal Constitution (art. 102/16). Mr. Dürrenmatt calls this report the counterpart of the account which the President of the United States has to render to Congress. Of course, the Federal Council had always reported annually on the activities of its Departments, but this was the first time an *exposé* was given on the state of the Confederation. He welcomes the report and considers it good and valuable as a picture of the varied tasks and duties the Federal Council had to deal with. It is his opinion that this new venture was to be developed further, and that its real value would be if such a report were debated by Parliament at the beginning of each new legislature.

(Report translated from information received by courtesy of Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

FEDERAL ACCOUNTS

The federal accounts for 1964 ended with an absolute record excess of income over expenditure (including movement of assets) of 581 million francs (1963: 574). This is the eleventh favourable balance in a row since 1954. In this period it has been possible to reduce the accrued deficit from two world wars and the years of depression from 8 to 4.2 milliards of francs. This has to be done according to the Federal Constitution. Though the result was gratifying, the state of affairs is unhealthy, and the difficulties lying ahead fill the authorities with concern, and the Federal Council, in its message to Parliament, referred to the enormous tasks of fostering research, supporting the universities, road construction (an increase in 1964 of Fr.387,638,408.— over the previous year), housing, water protection — to name but a few. The budget for 1965 estimates revenue at 5,031 million francs, expenditure at 4,481 mio, another favourable result to the tune of 550 million francs. Some further credit grants to the budget have already been asked for in May, including a loan to Geneva for the extension of Cointrin airport (8 mio) and larger subsidies for the development of sugar beet (10 mio).

Voices of concern have been heard in many quarters, for federal expenditure has doubled within five years, and it is feared that the tax payer will have to carry an even heavier burden. Comparisons were made between civil and military expense. Between 1960 and 1964, the former rose by 102%, the latter by 59%. But between 1950 and 1960 the latter had risen by 83%, and now a further rapid rise is feared once the "Mirage" accounts have to be faced. From the same source (Schweiz. Kaufmännisches Zentralblatt) comes an interesting aside: the Federation spends a mere 10% of the total expenditure on its own social institutions — together with the U.S.A., Switzerland is at the end of the list issued by the International Labour Office. On the other side, private social welfare is highly developed in Switzerland, and therefore there is no need for concern regarding social security.

The Swiss Society for economic development expressed surprise at the result of the federal accounts and considers that the Confederation has failed in its efforts to restrain expenditure in the light of the measures to curb the excessive economic boom.

Records are also registered in customs revenue for 1964 — Fr.1,446.5 millions, Fr.136.4 million more than in the previous year.

(Mainly by A.T.S.)

BUSY FEDERAL COUNCILLORS

The Swiss Minister for Communications and Energy, Federal Councillor Spuehler, has been appointed an Honorary President of the First World Exhibition on Communications in Munich.

The President of the Confederation Federal Councillor Tschudi was the guest of the Foreign Press in Berne when he gave an address on cultural relationships and interstate workings of social insurance.

Federal Councillor Spuehler spent a fortnight in California where he gave a lecture on problems of European integration at the University of Los Angeles.

Federal Councillor Wahlen, in charge of the Swiss Foreign Office and as President of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, was in the chair at a meeting in Strasbourg on 3rd May.

Early in May, the Eleventh General Assembly of the International Federation of War Veterans took place in Lausanne. Twenty million old soldiers from fifty countries belong to this organisation. Federal Councillor Chaudet, as head of the Federal Military Department addressed the meeting. Several resolutions were passed, one asking for the United Nations to be strengthened as an instrument of peace making. A bronze plate was presented to the International Red Cross Committee as an expression of thanks of the war veterans for all the help and assistance received.

On 5th May, a first "Europe Day" was held on the anniversary (1949) of the formation of the Council of Europe. On this occasion, Federal Councillor Wahlen gave a radio and TV address appealing to the Swiss people to co-operate in the creation of a united Europe.

At the delegates' meeting of the Liberal Democrats in Geneva, Federal Councillor Chaudet gave an address in which he stressed Geneva's importance within the Confederation and on the international scene, and then spoke on European integration. Federal Councillor Schaffner also addressed the assembly on "Switzerland in the currents of world politics".

The Swiss Minister for Economic Affairs, Federal Councillor Schaffner, and the Swiss Foreign Minister, Federal Councillor Wahlen, headed the Swiss delegation to the meeting of the EFTA Council in Vienna at the end of last month. (Switzerland was also represented in Helsinki earlier in the month, at the meeting of the EFTA Consultative Committee).

Finally, on 7th May, the television network of Western Switzerland in its programme "Continents sans visa" transmitted two interviews with UNO Secretary General U Thant and Federal Councillor Wahlen.

[A.T.S.]

Le Restaurant Français de la Place

SA CUISINE—SON SERVICE

CHEZ MAURICE

118 Seaside Road — Telephone 4894

EASTBOURNE SUSSEX

Propriétaire A. Bertschy F.C.F.A.

Chef de Cuisine Diplômé