

Swiss diplomacy in action at Helsinki conference

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SWISS DIPLOMACY IN ACTION AT HELSINKI CONFERENCE

Important talks are currently being held at Helsinki with the aim of preparing the Agenda of the planned conference on European security and co-operation. This conference should pave the way for a definite peace structure in Europe. It was initially a Russian idea to which Switzerland readily subscribed. The preliminary talks taking place at Helsinki have brought together since last November 34 Ambassadors from Western, Communist and non-aligned countries. Switzerland is represented by Ambassador Samuel Campiche. It is probably the first time since the end of the war that Swiss diplomacy is present on such an important platform. Implementation of neutrality has somewhat limited its action to purely commercial or bilateral issues. This time, definitely concerned by the issues at stake, Switzerland has decided to play the game fully and has indeed played an important part in the preliminary talks.

The Swiss delegation came to Helsinki with an original plan for setting up a peace-implementation machinery in Europe. This plan provided for a systematic procedure to deal with international differences. Switzerland has asked that it should feature on the Agenda and be examined by a sub-commission. It is possible that this idea will obtain Soviet backing.

In the early stages of the talks,

which were devoted to procedural matters, Switzerland spoke out clearly in favour of an equalitarian system of rotating chairmanships and was supported in this by several non-aligned countries and the French delegation.

The most important contribution to date of Ambassador Campiche and his team was submitted for consideration at the beginning of the second round of talks after a month-long Christmas recess. In order to speed up the talks, which had stumbled for days on several issues which the uninitiated public would be tempted to consider as trivial, the Swiss delegation offered to draw up an inventory of all the suggestions and ideas that had been expressed so far. It was suggested to group these ideas in three separate baskets labelled "security; economic relations; and cultural and personal relations". While the other negotiators went on an outing to Turku, in the west of Finland, the Swiss delegation undertook the task of sifting all these ideas, comparing them, eliminating possible duplications, and submitting to the "pre-conference" a list of all the ideas that had been put forward in respect of the three aforementioned chapters of European co-operation.

The Soviet delegation later included a fourth basket designed to receive suggestions concerning a planned permanent body after the envisaged Conference. This

Soviet idea had initially found little support from the Western side but it was believed, at the time of writing, that it would eventually obtain the assent of the NATO delegations.

The pre-conference planned to devote the final two weeks of its second round of talks to the task of working out the wording of the Agenda and the terms of reference of the future Conference, basing themselves on the conclusions of the "basket collection" of ideas. After this, the delegations planned to separate for a recess before meeting again for a final round to put the finishing touches to the Agenda and timetable to the Conference. If Russian wishes are satisfied, this Conference should, in its final stage, be a European summit meeting. It could take place this summer at Helsinki.

The present talks in Helsinki were a Russian idea hesitantly accepted by the Western powers. On the other hand, the talks on mutual and balanced force reductions in Europe (M.B.F.R.), were first suggested by NATO. It had difficulties in securing Soviet participation. There was a certain degree of diplomatic and subtle parley on both sides as Warsaw Pact countries wanted first to know the outcome of the Helsinki talks, whereas NATO claimed that the Helsinki and M.B.F.R. talks could not be dissociated.

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As a nation that has politically steered clear of the cold war, Switzerland was naturally not involved in the M.B.F.R. other than with their caretaking. Everything had been planned to hold preliminary M.B.F.R. consultations in Geneva on 31st January. A week before this deadline, Moscow made it known that it would be prepared to join in the talks only if they were held in Vienna.

Pleased with this demand (Vienna is Geneva's chief rival for the international conference business), the Austrian authorities readily announced that everything was ready in Vienna to hold the preliminary M.B.F.R. talks.

ARMY CHIEF SEES THREAT TO THE WEST

The Army is hitting back at the critics and dissenters of the national military establishment. Colonel Jürg Zumstein, commander of the 3rd Division, told a Press Conference that everything should be undertaken to eliminate the "agitators" who have recently caused trouble at basic training schools.

Recommending "energetic procedures", he said that these agitators should be "isolated" and prevented from using

the Army as a "political forum".

Colonel Zumstein, who was commenting on a report published by the Swiss Societies of Army Officers, said that the continuing imbalance of forces on either side of the Iron Curtain presented a threat to the security of the West. He warned against excessive optimism on the outcome of the planned European Security Conference and claimed that the Soviet Union was using the talks as a means of "rocking the Western countries to sleep."

Switzerland should be prepared for a military emergency. All those called to national service were to submit to the mission assigned to the Army by the Constitution. This mission, in the last resort, was to defend the country to the last man. Such a pledge could only be carried out by a modern army, he added.

Campaigning on the same issues, delegates from all the military societies of the country, which together claim about 120,000 members, launched a national petition calling for a "strong army". The three main points of the document were: Guarantees that the Army can protect the nation; assessment of the ability of the Army to carry out its mission; examination of the means of improving its preparation.

This petition was partly motivated by the disappointment and confusion which followed the Government's decision to abandon planned orders for a new fighter jet. The Federal Council decided last Autumn to buy neither the American "Corsair" nor the French "Milan" which had been tested by Swiss experts during the preceding six years. Angered by the Government's apparent absence of firm policy in military supply matters, the armaments chief at the Military Department resigned a short while later.

In another development, the ardent champions of the horse mustered their forces to challenge Parliament's backing to a Government decision to disband the Army's 18 squadrons of mounted dragoons.

Mr. Simon Chappuis, President of the Equestrian Association of Canton Vaud, said that an initiative was under consideration. The people would be invited to add an article "19-bis" in the Constitution to the effect that "The Army shall comprise at least 18 squadrons of mounted dragoons".

Parliament's vote on the Cavalry followed several divisions in both houses and counter-proposals by Parliament's Military Commission. After compromise suggestions that the Cavalry's strength should be reduced by half, the National Council finally accepted to do away with the horse as an instrument of combat.

The cavalry-supporters have little time left: Dragoon troops have already been assigned to new units for their 1973 military repetition courses.

"Shadow Cabinet" in the Jura

The "Rassemblement Jurassien", the political organisation which stands for the separation of the French-speaking Jura area from Canton Berne, has set up a "Jura Democratic Opposition Government". Membership to this new shadow cabinet has been entrusted by 421 delegates of the Rassemblement to three well-known Separatists at a special meeting. The three men are Roger Schaffter, Vice-President of the Rassemblement Jurassien Mr. Roland Béguelin, its General Secretary, and Mr. Roger Jardin, its Assistant General-Secretary.

It was also decided during the meeting to make an appeal to the Federal Council for federal intervention in the Jura problem. So far, this question has been examined by an inter-cantonal commission and The Confederation has not interfered, wishing to respect cantonal independence. The Separatist movement has always rejected openings by the Berne authorities and turned down a recently-announced plan to give the Jura a certain degree of autonomy within the framework of a new regional organisation.

Two weeks ago, a delegate from Saanen, in the "Old Canton", caused an upstir at the Great Council of Berne by suggesting that, all else having failed, it was appropriate to call for federal intervention in the Jura.

During the same special meeting, the Rassemblement Jurassien decided to intensify efforts to strengthen its hold on the south of the Jura.

Tension in the Jura springs from the fact that the three northern French-speaking and Catholic districts of Délémont, Porrentruy and Franches-Montagnes are Separatist, whereas the majority of the population in the three southern districts (Saint Imier, Courtelary and La Neuveville) are Anti-Separatist and wish to remain in Canton Berne. The Separatists have been campaigning for the past 25 years for a separation of the Jura from Berne. The Jura was given to Berne in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna.

Present plans are to offer the three Separatist districts the alternative of becoming a 23rd Swiss Canton or of obtaining for the whole Jura, enlarged political representation at the Federal Parliament.

CANTONAL TAX FREEDOM

The Federal Court has ruled that a decision by the Canton of Vaud to raise a tax of 100 francs on motorists using nailed tyres as a kind of toll-levy compensating for damages caused by nails to road surfacing was constitutional. The new tax had brought an appeal before the highest court of the land by a motoring organisation which claimed that the tax was unfair. It had pointed out that motorists residing in other cantons and using the roads of Vaud were exempted from the tax. The Federal Court ruling strengthened the principle of cantonal sovereignty in non-federal tax matters.



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