

Comment

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A PRIVILEGED RELATIONSHIP

Switzerland is sometimes considered as a loner on the international scene. Its traditional neutrality has prevented her from joining the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the Common Market. Switzerland has insisted on not committing herself to the aims of any world organisation that might prejudice her strict conception of neutrality. This policy has paid off since it has won Switzerland a very special reputation and earned her an important place in the political and economic life of the world. While not compromising on its fundamental political option, armed and perpetual neutrality, Switzerland has joined various United Nations agencies, signed an Association agreement with the EEC and taken part in world monetary discussions.

But Switzerland's institutional isolation is not as important as it might seem since Berne has developed special links with two other countries with many things in common: Sweden and Austria. These two countries are those with which Switzerland's political links are possibly the strongest. Although trade and technical co-operation between them cannot be compared with relations between Switzerland and France, or Germany, for example, this special link could possibly convey considerable status to diplomatic postings in Stockholm or Vienna. At any rate, leaders of the three countries regularly exchange visits. The Austrian foreign minister visited Berne last summer. Mr. Pierre Graber, Head of the Political Department later went to Stockholm.

One important development which has contributed to strengthening the ties between the three countries has been the European Security Conference. Although the second stage of this major gathering has been bogged down in Geneva for many months, Switzerland has taken a particular interest in its work and, at the beginning, was the vocal advocate of a multilateral peace-keeping system inspired on the Pact that held the

Confederates together in the early days of our national history.

Switzerland, Sweden and Austria emerged from that conference as a new grouping to be reckoned with. The three countries, often joined by Finland, spoke in a same voice that stood out against the other power groups, namely, the NATO and Warsaw Pact countries. The three countries can almost be said to have formed an unwritten alliance reflecting their common view of European and world problems.

Sweden's foreign minister, Mr. Sven Anderson, visited Berne in mid-September in return for his Swiss counterpart's earlier visit to Stockholm. The Security Conference took an important place in their talks. The two men also discussed development aid and the energy crisis. On that particular issue, both agreed that any agreement to share out available petrol supplies among industrial countries should be worked out and implemented within the framework of an existing and well-established body: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Another matter of common interest to the two countries is arms procurement. Sweden and Switzerland are outside any military alliance and rely on themselves for their defence. They have, all the same, endeavoured to co-operate in the field of arms supplies and a joint commission has been set up to examine eventual possibilities. Before becoming Foreign Affairs Minister, Mr. Anderson was in charge of his country's defence ministry. It was in that capacity that he received last year Mr. Rudolf Gnaegi, Head of the Military Department. The latter was highly impressed by the performance of the Saab Viggen fighter – which didn't prevent him later to order trials on the American "Tiger". But Mr. Anderson wasn't offended. "I am not an arms salesman", he said, recognising, moreover, that the Viggen might not necessarily be adapted to Switzerland's geographical conditions.

The same kind of co-operation is in progress between Switzerland and Austria. The two countries' military authorities meet frequently. Austria has bought Swiss equipment and the Swiss

Army uses some Austrian material, such as Haflinger lorries. PMB

SWISS EVENTS

Federal

Swiss-German exchange of views

A month after his trip to China and Thailand in August, Mr. Pierre Graber was in Bonn and became the first-ever Head of the Political Department to make an official visit to West Germany. This may appear surprising in view of the close ties between the two countries – Germany being Switzerland's first trade partner – but conforms to the traditional practice of Swiss leaders limiting their visits abroad to a minimum. But Mr. Graber appears to have broken that tradition with his two trips to the Middle East and his recent journey to the Far East. His visit last year in Cairo, where Mr. Graber chaired a conference of Swiss ambassadors to the Arab world and Israel, was strongly criticised by some circles. Because of these criticisms, he had postponed his trip to Bonn. This visit had originally been planned for Autumn 1973.

Mr. Graber had a round of talks with his West German counterpart, Mr. Hans Dietrich Genscher. There being no particular pending problems between the two countries, these talks consisted mainly in an exchange of views and information on problems of common interest, such as the European Security Conference and energy policy. Mr. Graber was pleased to hear that West Germany disagreed with American proposals to create a "club" of consumer nations banding together against the petroleum-producing countries. Switzerland, which is closely following the work of the 12-nation Energy Group, would not subscribe to any aggressive policy of this kind as it would conflict with her policy of neutrality.



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