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The survival of Switzerland

Switzerland has had to face many problems in the 1980's, the most crucial being our role in world affairs.

Switzerland's choices and options in foreign policy are determined today as they have been for many centuries by our special geographical location and by the fact that we have had to survive as a multi-cultural community – a federation of different states, languages, and religions – in a Europe which, for most of the last 600 years, has been a place of great turmoil. The foremost principle of our foreign policy has, therefore, been neutrality. It is a means to defend ourselves against foreign enemies and to balance the different interests and sympathies of the Swiss peoples.

But neutrality as a mere principle is not enough. History has demonstrated that neutrality has to be protected. Switzerland must have the will to deter any possible attack. It does not mean that we hold the illusion that we are invulnerable; however, we want to be able to defend ourselves. We have an armed force which, in 48 hours, can muster 650,000 men. It, in fact, is the second largest army in Europe. We also buy the best modern armament systems.

You may conclude that a neutral country tends to play a passive role in world affairs. This is not so. Although neutral, Switzerland is deeply committed to Western democratic ideals; therefore, we are highly interested in the survival of these principles. East-West relations are, for us, the key to our own future.

Inside the group of so-called "non-aligned" countries, we have tried to find solutions agreeable to both the Eastern bloc countries and the Nato countries at the same time.

Détente might be a dirty word for some, but it should be our ultimate goal. However, it should not be sought at any price. The Helsinki agreement held the promise of a

better world for all Europeans. Our efforts must still go toward the implementation of the very clear paragraphs of the final act. We look for security for the individual, not governmental authorities.

Switzerland today is not a member of the United Nations. Several factors have impeded us from joining. At the end of the Second World War, the UN was founded as a club for the victorious nations. Neutral countries were not regarded favourably at that time. We continued to remain aloof from the UN even though many other countries, including China, were becoming members. We are, on the other hand, members of all the specialised agencies which deal with the hard facts of international life with trade, health, and education.

Joining the United Nations poses two questions for the Swiss nation. Does our neutrality require us not to join the UN, as the charter calls for military sanctions under certain circumstances? And is it advisable for a neutral country to join an organisation which, more and more, has been critical of the

SWITZERLAND'S Ambassador to the United States, Mr Anton R. Hegner, has spoken of the "many problems" facing his country during the 1980's – "the most crucial of these being Switzerland's role in world affairs". His comments were made during a recent speech to the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco. Because of the topicality and wide-ranging nature of his speech – which covered the controversial issue of Swiss membership of the United Nations and European security – the publishers of the Swiss Observer consider his comments also worthy of inclusion in this magazine. The following are extracts from Ambassador Hegner's address on "Switzerland and the International Challenges of the Eighties".

Western world of which we feel a part.

Last year, the Federal Council proposed to Parliament and will, through Parliament, propose to the people that Switzerland join the United Nations. My government believes that the status of neutrality has been recognised by the UN in the case of Austria, and that neutrality is compatible with the charter of the United Nations.

As for meddling in international politics, the time is long past when political questions were only discussed in the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Now, almost daily, questions involving the Middle East, for example, are brought before specialised agencies in which we take part. On the other hand, the UN General Assembly has become, more and more, a place where questions of very material interest to us get their final forum. Presently, we are excluded from participating in these final formulations.

Therefore, we think joining the United Nations is a responsible step for us to take, considering the growing inter-relationships between nations.

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