Our Swiss abroad

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OUR SWISS ABROAD

The following extracts were taken from an address by M. Maurice Jaccard, head of the Swiss Federal Office in charge of questions relating to Swiss Abroad, which he delivered on the occasion of the Annual Assembly and Dinner of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the New Helvetic Society, 28th April, in Philadelphia, U.S.A.

A characteristic of the situation of the Swiss who live abroad is diversity. Today about 265,000 Swiss citizens are registered at Swiss Embassies, Legations and Consulates as against 400,000 in 1939. Such a comparison gives an idea of how devastating were the effects of war on Swiss communities abroad. It is also worth mentioning, that in 1939 a third of the fellow-countrymen registered at Embassies, Legations or Consulates, had a second nationality. Today there are almost twice as many. About 60% of the Swiss registered abroad have acquired the nationality of the country in which they live. And were we to include in these figures all those who are not registered, then the percentage would be much greater.

When examining the situation of the Swiss abroad we must divide them up into different groups. It is very important to know whether a Swiss lives in New York, in Liechtenstein, in Buenos Aires, in Hong Kong or in Bucharest. For the sake of simplicity we shall take three groups of countries into consideration. First of all, Eastern countries, that is countries behind the Iron Curtain; secondly, the so-called Western countries, and lastly the underdeveloped countries. As you will have noticed the division is not a matter of chance. It shows clearly how closely the Swiss abroad are linked to events in their country of residence and to what extent they share its fate. I shall try to describe a few of the more typical problems confronting the Swiss living in each one of these three groups.

In the Eastern countries, particularly in the Balkans, there were thriving Swiss communities. Many of our fellow-countrymen had important places in industry, in trade, in the banks and in agriculture. They made a considerable contribution to the economic development of these countries, many representing renowned and often world-famous Swiss industries, in particular firms of the chemical and machine industries. Many fairly large-sized and smaller firms were founded with the help of Swiss capital. Not a few of our fellow-citizens worked as experts for the Governments of these countries and in that way reached high positions.

The far-reaching changes in the political, economic and social structure of the Eastern states wrought by war dealt a heavy blow at the situation of our fellow-countrymen. Hundreds were forced to give up their living and return to Switzerland or settle in other countries. Only a few Swiss, mostly aged people who had acquired the nationality of their country of residence, remained in those countries.

The structural changes led to nationalization of private property. Appealing to principles of International Law, the Swiss Government was of the opinion that these nationalizations could only take place against the payment of just compensation to Swiss owners. After long and difficult negotiations, reparations were obtained from Eastern countries in lump sums which were distributed to the victims in accordance with rules of International Law.

Besides, the Confederation as far as was financially possible, helped our fellow-countrymen to start a new living elsewhere. Its expenses, on behalf of Swiss abroad who lost their belongings in the second World War, amount to about 300 million francs.

Our world is divided up into at least two parts. This is the case in particular for Europe where the two worlds are separated by a demarcation line of a political and ideological nature, with its repercussions on the situation of Swiss abroad.

In Western Europe among our fellow-countrymen, one often comes across problems relating to Switzerland's attitude towards European integration. These problems are mostly brought up by fellow-citizens who have settled in the countries of the European Economic Community. Switzerland's attitude is often misunderstood in Western countries. A common reproach is that of overlooking reality and clinging to antiquated institutions like neutrality, our system of direct democracy and our federalism. In our opinion this criticism is unjustified. If we hold on to our institutions, it is because we believe that they alone correspond to our nature, to our diversity and allow us, a nation of five and a half million inhabitants, with two denominations and four languages, to live in peace. If we hold on steadfast to our neutrality it is because we are convinced that in this way we are of more use to the community of nations than in giving up our neutrality. We believe that our neutrality, which has its roots in an age-old experience, must be armed. The financial and other sacrifices which the Swiss nation makes for its armed neutrality reflect this belief. For 1962, the Confederation will devote a third of its whole budget to defence. Switzerland is no military vacuum in the middle of Europe and if Western Europe were to spend amounts of the same importance, it would now have 300 Divisions.

These are questions of which we must continually remind our fellow-countrymen in the West. We set great store on the Swiss abroad understanding the policy of their fatherland and approving it.

Along with the development which took place in Europe after the war and which led to the splitting up of the old continent into two, another situation developed, namely, what we generally regard as the end of the colonial system. Whole regions of Asia and Africa became independent, but they need help from highly industrial countries. The problems of the Western world are closely related to those of the underdeveloped countries, and our fellow-countrymen in Africa and Asia see it daily. They must adjust themselves to the new situation which is not always easy for everyone. In the Congo, for example, in a very short time Swiss citizens with brilliant qualifications lost all their belongings and were only able to save their skins. Elsewhere the prejudice to personal and economic situation was not so striking but the damage done is nevertheless very much there. It is not always noticeable and it is all the more painful when the final stage of development is reached. Other changes are the consequence of differences in the political and economic structure of these countries. We negotiate with the authorities of these
regions in order to come to reasonable terms. One cannot
always avoid losing one's living and it sometimes happens
that a person did not gather the meaning of certain signs
at the right moment. He who took precautionary measures
at the right time and adhered to the "Solidarity Fund"
for Swiss abroad is most fortunate.

However, all is not lost for our fellow-countrymen in
underdeveloped countries. Because they are subjects of
a neutral country, the Swiss in those countries enjoy
great sympathy. Swiss experts who are sent as technical
assistants are welcome and have already accomplished a
useful task. Swiss citizens who settled many years ago
in underdeveloped countries, and have gained precious
experience there, accomplished similar jobs.

These few comments show how diverse are the
problems the Swiss abroad have to face. When the Swiss
authorities help our fellow-countrymen abroad they must
not be too restrictive in their choice of means of inter-
vention. We must adjust ourselves to the conditions.
Nevertheless a certain number of guiding principles must
he observed in protecting interests of Swiss abroad. When-
ever possible we must seek to strengthen the situation of
our fellow-countrymen by agreements with Foreign
Governments. Switzerland has signed a great number of
treaties with Foreign States and they have been of great
advantage to our fellow-countrymen because they cover a
wide field of subjects. Such examples are treaties of
establishment, friendship, trade, arbitration, double
taxation, social insurance and compensation. When we
grant a Swiss citizen diplomatic and consular protection
we appeal to these treaties or, as is often the case, to
general principles of International Law. We fight with
our strongest weapon. As a small country we are de-
pendent upon International Law. It implies also that we
abide strictly by International Law. Of course, we can-
not appeal to International Law when it suits us and
ignore it when it might be of prejudice. The Swiss abroad
must abide by the same rules with all the consequences
that this may have for double-nationals. As is well-known,
a rule of International Law has it that the first country of
origin cannot grant diplomatic protection against the
second country of origin. The Swiss citizen who acquires
a second citizenship would do well to know these con-
sequences. It does not mean, however, that he does not
remain a Swiss citizen. The change merely intervenes in
his international status.

The Confederation does a lot for the Swiss abroad.
It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the Con-
federation seeks to nationalize the community of Swiss
abroad. On the contrary, the Swiss authorities try to
stimulate private organizations of Swiss abroad. All over
the world there exist a great number of Swiss societies, the
aims of which are to strengthen ties among the Swiss
abroad. All these organizations are independent of the
State, and the authorities do not intend to interfere. Our
diplomatic and consular representations as well as the
national authorities in Berne help these organizations by
word and deed. Our wish is that the liberal principles on
which our State is based, also be the guiding factors in
our relationship to the Swiss abroad. When Swiss Laws
which are of interest to the Swiss abroad have to be
applied, representatives of the Swiss abroad are invited to
participate in their application.

We believe that a trustful, fruitful and constructive
relationship can flourish between the authorities in Berne
on the one hand and all the Swiss abroad and their insti-
tutions on the other hand. You may rest assured that the
authorities have great understanding for the concerns of
the Swiss abroad.

(Reprinted from the "Americankische Schweizerzeitung")

EXTRAITS DE: LES CRIEES FAITES EN LA CITE
DE GENEVE L'AN MIL CINQ CENT SOIXANTE

Les 4 Syndics qui représentaient le pouvoir exécutif
en 1560 étaient: Michel Rosset, Jacques Blondel, Pierre
Mégervand, Claude de la Maison Neuve (Jacques Blondel
eu 17 enfants dont Philibert Blondel procureur général en
1592. Syndic en 1602 accusé de haute trahison et roy
vif en 1604).

Edits faits et passés par nos Magnifiques et Très
Honorés Seigneurs Syndiques et Conseil de cette Cité de
Genève et publiés à voix de trompette le mercredi vingt-
huitième de Février et le mardi cinquième de Mai l'an
1560: L'on vous fait savoir de la part de nos très redoutez
Seigneurs et Conseils de cette Cité:

11 Item
Que nul soit si osé ne si hardi de paillarder, jurongner,
 vagabonder, ne perdre son temps follement, ne se des-
baucher l'un l'autre mais qu'un chacun doive travailler
jouxe sa qualité sur peine d'estre puni par justice, selon
l'exigence du cas.

13 Item
Que nulles personnes n'ayant a chanter chansons dis-
honnestes, n'y danser, ne faire masques, mommeries
mommonns, n'y aucunement se disguiser en sorte que ce
soit, au peine d'estre mis 3 jours en prison au pain et à
l'eau et de soixante sols pour une chaque fois.

22 Item
Est defendu a tous et un chacun de quel estat
qualité et condition qu'ils soyent, qu'ils n'ayent a com-
meter aucun exces en viandes, soit en nopces, banquets,
festins ou autrement, ni en habit et vestements: mais que
chacun se doive en tels endroits contenir et porter
modestement et se vestir honestement et simplement selon
son estat, à peine de soixante sols pour une cheune fois
qui il sera cognu faire du contraire. Et en outre les per-
severans et rebelles chastiez iouxte l'exigence du cas.

27 Item
Que nul de quel estat, qualité et condition qu'il
soit faisant nopces, banquets ou festins n'ait a faire plus
haut de trois venues ou mis a service desdits banquets:
à chacune venue plus haut de quatre plats honestes et
non excessifs, hormis les fruitages: a peine de soixante sols
pour une chacune fois.

28 Item
Que nul n'aît a aller de nuit par la ville après neuf
heures sans chandelles et sans cause legitime sinon ceux
qui sont deutez pour le guet sur peine d'estre mis en
prison trois jours et de soixante sols.

(Research by H. L. Charnaux)