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ECONOMIC NEWS

Switzerland's Foreign Trade and Exports of Textiles in 1953

In world economy, taken as a whole, the situation remained favourable during 1953, although there were signs of a falling off in certain countries. Supply and demand both increased again owing to a rise in the capacity of output. The turnover of the consumer goods industries, in particular, increased appreciably.

Switzerland's foreign trade also benefited from the continuing favourable international economic situation. However, imports were 135 million Swiss francs less than the previous year; quantitatively the drop amounted to

some 400,000 metric tons (— 4.5 %). Exports, on the other hand, reached a new high with regard to both quantity and value. Compared with the previous year, Switzerland's sales abroad increased by 415.7 million Swiss francs (+ 8.8 %) while the increase in volume exceeded 10 %. Here moreover are the figures for Switzerland's foreign trade for last year and the year before with, by way of comparison, those of the last year before the war and the first year of general prosperity after the war (1948) :

TOTAL IMPORTS				TOTAL EXPORTS			
in millions of Swiss francs							
1938	1948	1952	1953	1938	1948	1952	1953
1606.9	4998.9	5205.7	5070.7	1316.6	3434.5	4748.9	5164.6

In connection with these figures there is one striking fact to which attention must be called: the balance of Switzerland's foreign trade for 1953 was actually a favourable one, something which has only occurred twice before — in the war years 1916 and 1945. It was particularly trade in consumer goods that developed during 1953, especially with regard to exports and imports of manufactured products.

In Swiss imports, although activity in the field of raw materials dropped off slightly in certain sectors, raw materials for the textile industry increased quantitatively. Let us point out in this connection that the average figures quoted per 100 kg. net for raw cotton and cellulose for the manufacture of rayon dropped remarkably in the course of the year (from frs. 455 to 395 and from frs.

125 to 83.26 respectively). In the field of *manufactured products*, which shows a big increase compared with 1952, it is mainly woollen clothing fabrics, rayon and staple-fibre yarns as well as fabrics in pure silk and rayon that have contributed to this increase where textiles are concerned.

Regarding exports from Switzerland, the increase with respect to both quantity and value is mainly due to the *manufactured products*. Detailed figures for the principal textile products are given below. All the specialities listed have contributed to the increase in exports, except for cotton yarns the export index of which (index of quantities weighted by values) nevertheless rose from 88 in 1952 to 92 in 1953. The other figures speak for themselves without any need for further comment.

Swiss exports of the principal textile products

(in millions of Swiss fr.)

	1938	1952	1953
Cotton yarns	23.6	70.2	53.9
Cotton fabrics	58.9	113.4	162.3
Embroideries	26.1	89.7	98.7
Rayon and staple-fibre yarns	20.2	70.1	73.4
Silk and rayon fabrics	30.7	94.1	104.6
Silk and rayon ribbons	5.8	9.9	10.7
Worsted yarns	2.0	15.4	12.5
Wool fabrics	3.2	19.3	31.3
Hosiery and knitted wear	8.0	35.6	43.2
Ready-to-wear clothing	11.7	40.0	49.7
Millinery braids	13.6	34.6	38.5

The sale of textiles and the consumer goods market in Switzerland

In its 17th quarterly report, the *Swiss Cotton Board* at St. Gall published an interesting study by Dr. J.-J. Senglet, of the *Institute of Economic Research at the Federal Technical Institute in Zurich*, on the changes that have taken place in the sale of textiles in the consumer goods market.

The slackening off in the textile market in the spring of 1951, after the period of intensive buying with a view to building up stocks had come to an end, was the object of much keen discussion in textile circles who wanted to ascertain to what extent the textile industry had suffered from the change in the habits of consumers. The suggestion was put forward that certain expenses, particularly in connection with the increase in the number of motor vehicles, have reduced the private means available for the purchase of textiles. The figures available are unfortunately not sufficient to make it possible to get to the bottom of the problem of this change in the structure of the consumer goods market, but the few existing indications have nevertheless enabled the author of the report in question to come to a few general conclusions concerning the position of textiles in the sales of the retail trade.

First of all it is necessary to determine whether or not the position of textiles and clothing on the market has become less satisfactory. From the studies of O. E. E. C., carried further by the author, it may be concluded that the share of textiles in the turnover of the retail trade was 21.1 % in 1953 as compared with 22.2 in 1950 and 21.9 % in 1948; consequently there has been no appreciable change and, it would seem, even a slight improvement as compared with before the war (1938 = 18.8 %). Furthermore, figures for household budgets during the last forty years lead to similar conclusions: the proportion relating to clothing has not undergone any appreciable change during the last four decades. However it must not be forgotten that these are calculations based on values and that prices of clothing are those that have increased the most since 1939. Leaving out of account the influence of prices, there has been an increase of 1/5 in the quantities sold since 1938. However the population has

increased by 16 % during the same period, so that the actual per capita consumption of textiles has increased only very slightly since before the war. On the other hand, total sales of the retail trade have increased by 36 to 38 % in quantity, so it may be concluded that sales of textiles (in quantity) have increased in a proportion that is below the average. It must also be pointed out that corresponding to this falling off in the real position of textiles within the framework of the total turnover of the retail trade, there is an increase in the total sales of textiles, in quantity, and that the consumption per head of the population has, practically speaking, undergone no change.

Attention should be called to the part played by the changes in the habits of the consumer with regard to clothing. It should also be taken into consideration that there has been a change in demand in favour of the medium and superior qualities. The fact that the consumption of textiles does not keep up with the development of incomes is due in part to the fact that foreign workers employed in Switzerland do not spend in this country all the money they earn here.

Thus, according to Dr. J.-J. Senglet, textiles do not belong to a category of products liable to develop greatly. The rapid increase in the standard of living during recent years is the cause of the decrease in their importance within the framework of the total turnover of the consumer goods market, but contrary to what is often said, it is not true that there is a definite decrease in the total consumption of textiles and in the consumption per head of the population. However, the increase in incomes mainly benefits other groups of products. The number of private motor cars in Switzerland has trebled since 1938 and that of motor cycles increased sixfold during the same period; imports of radios and refrigerators are also many times greater than before, to quote but these examples; moreover the demand for services of various kinds has also increased enormously.

But, on the other hand, these increases in consumption and these changes in the habits of consumers have also contributed to giving a new impetus to sales of textile products.

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