

Swiss Neutrality in a changing world

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“WE SHALL NOT DISSIPATE OUR HERITAGE”

Federal Councillor Chaudet, President of the Confederation for 1962, was one of the illustrious invitees at a dinner and reception given by the foreign press in Switzerland at the Foyer de la Press Etrangère in Berne. As guest of honour he addressed the gathering. He referred to the freedom of the press and that this should not be misused. The press had a noble task in showing the daily events in our country in their true colours and to give them fair interpretation against the background of tradition and reality and thus stem the tide of superficiality.

He then alluded to the weighty problems of European Integration. “Whatever forms the European arrangements will take, it will always be of utmost importance that the Swiss people will keep its unity, its will for independence and its statute of neutrality. On that basis we can take part in the discussions out of strength, ready and willing to give up material advantages in order to contribute to the success of the Common Market. On the other hand we would be equally willing to shoulder even larger sacrifices by *not* joining the European Economic Community if integration should cost us essential political values.”

Such an expression of our neutrality, Federal Councillor Chaudet maintained, was rooted in the deep conviction and determination of the Swiss people. In spite of the outside problem possible integration has put before our country, the Swiss were firmly convinced that neutrality was the means of our independence. This was vital to us, and could on the other hand also serve the interests of other nations. Neutrality is not equivalent to selfishness and aloofness. It embraces efforts and military expenditure which our country has never refused. Rejecting any pacts, Switzerland is determined to organise her defence with her own means.

The President then referred to the well-organised and well-trained army which in a possible armed conflict would ensure that Switzerland was no military vacuum and certainly no weakness in Europe's make-up. He concluded by stressing that the difficulties facing Switzerland in connection with the Common Market were not insurmountable. On the contrary, they would act as a challenge to our imagination and adaptability and would counteract the dangers of our material well-being. “The most important thing will be that we shall never be induced by any economic or technical advantages to make any political concessions. We shall not dissipate our heritage. In spite of everything which darkens the horizon we shall trust in everything that hope and faith can give mankind — we shall believe in the future.”

Mariann.

(Based on ATS report.)

Schweizerglaube

Lass uns sein ein Licht auf Erden
Und ein Beispiel steter Treu,
Frei, wie wir sind, andre werden,
Und zertritt die Tyrannei!
Gib, dass alle sicher wahren,
Bis die Zeit die Pforte schliesst,
Bis aus allen Nationen
Eine nur geworden ist.

(Joh. Caspar Lavater.)

SWISS NEUTRALITY IN A CHANGING WORLD

The Philipp-Albert Stapferhaus Foundation has been arranging discussion meetings on Swiss topical questions at the lovely Lenzburg Castle. The theme of the fourth of these was “To Consider Swiss Foreign Policy in Connection with European Integration”. Federal Councillor Dr. H. Schaffner, head of the Department of National Economy, addressed the large meeting, which was attended by members of the New Helvetic Society, the “Pro Helvetia” Foundation and other similar bodies. In his speech the Federal Councillor explained that the ideological conception behind the structure of the Swiss state was rooted in the determination to keep alive the traditional Swiss freedom with its federalism, its strong local political life, centred in the Commune, the loyalty to the Confederation and the will to defend the country, the sense of freedom and independence, as well as the firm belief in organic development from the bottom upwards. The freedom fought for by our forefathers was for ever a guiding principle and constant justification of our existence. Solidarity and readiness to defend our frontiers have continued to the present and are a guarantee for the future. As another aspect of Swiss ideology Bundesrat Schaffner mentioned the inclination to be suspicious of developments abroad, which was responsible for the conservative attitude of the Swiss.

Abroad, very often our neutrality was considered the main characteristic of the Swiss Confederation. Our neutrality was, however, only a means to an end — that of keeping alive the freedom of the small state. It was, therefore, not determined by ideology as much as by reason. Neutrality obliges the state to a corresponding attitude, but the citizen is in no way restrained from expressing his ideas and opinions in either word or print. This principle is inviolable. On the other, the fact that the upkeep of neutrality ultimately lies in the hands of the citizen limits any possible contrast between the duties of the Confederation and the partiality of the citizen. It is imperative that other countries have no doubts that the Swiss people wholeheartedly approve of their constitutionally rooted neutrality and accept it without regard to ups and downs in world politics. In spite of or even because of the political upheavals in Europe, our neutrality becomes more and more important. It could play a considerable part in a world riddled with East-West differences. More countries than ever look on Switzerland's attitude with respect, not least the underdeveloped nations whose special sympathy Switzerland enjoys on account of her unblemished past with regard to colonial aspirations.

Federal Councillor Schaffner went on to talk about European Integration and affirmed the conviction that only in purely economic fields was any integration possible — never in any political sphere.

Mariann.

(Based on ATS report.)

Wer die Wohltaten seines Vaterlandes genießt, ohne ihm Gegendienste zu leisten, der gleicht den Hornissen im Bienenkorbe und verdient, sein Schicksal zu erdulden.

(Gregor Girard.)