

Swiss statement to the council of ministers of EEC

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SWISS STATEMENT TO THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF EEC

Brussels, 24th September 1962

(SUMMARY)

In the middle of December 1961 Switzerland proposed to the EEC to open negotiations for an agreement which would enable her "to participate in an appropriate form in the integrated European Market".

At the invitation of the Council of Ministers of the EEC, the Swiss Foreign Minister, Federal Councillor F. T. Wahlen, who was accompanied by Federal Councillor H. Schaffner, Minister for Economic Affairs, indicated in Brussels, in the name of the Swiss Government, the reasons why Switzerland wishes to negotiate such an agreement.

Mr. Wahlen referred to the extremely varied cultural, intellectual, economic and financial exchanges between Switzerland and the EEC-countries. Switzerland, Mr. Wahlen pointed out, has few natural resources and therefore depends, more than any other country, on her foreign trade. "Per head of the population, the Swiss external trade figures are among the highest in the world; they are much higher than the average for the EEC-countries; they are four times those of the United States."

Swiss trade with the EEC is particularly developed. It accounts for 62% of Switzerland's imports and 42% of her exports. Swiss imports from the EEC last year reached a total of nearly 7.5 billion Swiss francs. Swiss trade with the six countries of the Community during the same year amounted to about 2,000 Swiss francs per capita, whereas the corresponding figure for the Community relating to the internal trade among the six countries plus their imports to and exports from Switzerland averaged 640 Swiss francs per capita. There are about 630,000 foreign workers in Switzerland. In order to safeguard and develop the high degree of interpenetration of the economic activities of Switzerland and the EEC-countries, it is necessary that Switzerland should participate in the Common Market, in the heart of which she is located.

Mr. Wahlen then explained that in the arrangements to be concluded with the Community Switzerland will have to safeguard her neutrality, her federalist structure and her system of direct democracy which are the basis of her political stability. In the light of these considerations, Switzerland has examined how she could participate in the integrated European market. It seems to her that the association provided for in Article 238 of the Treaty of Rome would best meet the situation. This solution, while taking into account the need for a comprehensive economic arrangement should dissipate any possible apprehensions that the participation of a neutral state might prejudice the implementation of the objectives other than economic which the Community is also pursuing.

As to the role of Switzerland's neutrality in the present world, Mr. Wahlen said the following: "The upheavals which during our century have transformed Europe and the world and marked the beginning of a new era placed Swiss neutrality in a new and wider international context. As has been demonstrated many times in the last few years, neutrality retains its meaning and its "raison d'être". It enables my country to accomplish — in Europe and on other continents — tasks which can only be entrusted to a country which practises a permanent neutrality." Mr. Wahlen's statement also mentions the specific requirements

of neutrality with regard to trade policy towards third countries, the maintenance of an adequate basis of supply for a war-time economy and the possibility of suspending or terminating an agreement with the EEC. These requirements are identical for all neutral States and have been defined in the same manner by the Austrian and Swedish delegations, at the end of July. Although they are essential for Switzerland, they have only, as Federal Councillor Wahlen pointed out, a "marginal importance" for the integrated market as a whole. Neutrality can "neither in the case of Switzerland nor in that of Austria or Sweden slow down the building of Europe. We are, on the contrary, convinced, that the neutrality of these States usefully complements the European system which aims at drawing peoples nearer together and at an ever closer co-operation, as is our wish and that of the countries that surround us." The Swiss statement underlines that "Switzerland takes a positive interest in the endeavours to unite Europe. She considers the elimination of sources of conflict between the members of the Community as a fundamental factor of these efforts. As a country founded upon the principles of democracy and individual freedom, Switzerland is also determined to do everything in her power within the framework of her permanent neutrality to contribute to the maintenance of peace and liberty in the world."

The Swiss statement, starting from working hypotheses, goes on to describe the possible form and substance of the association which "should have a wide economic content, consistent with the fact that the traditional co-operation between Switzerland and the European countries already embraces broad sectors of the economic life". It should be based on reciprocal rights and obligations. Special economic problems of Switzerland are also mentioned in the statement, particularly those regarding agriculture and labour, which will have to be taken into consideration.

Federal Councillor Wahlen made it clear that "we do not seek to obtain a privileged position in relation to present or future member countries of the Community". He gave the assurance that Switzerland is prepared to co-operate closely with EEC "in order to facilitate the functioning of the integrated market and to ensure fair conditions of competition". "Our essential objective" said Federal Councillor Wahlen, "is to safeguard and develop the co-operation and integration already realised between our countries."

Switzerland wishes to support the endeavours of the EEC to reinforce European economy, also for the benefit of developing countries, as well as a further liberalization of world trade. The relevant part of the statement reads as follows: "The widening of the markets, made desirable by the very conditions of modern production, will strengthen the European economy and consequently increase the economic potential it will be able to place at the disposal of the developing countries; Switzerland wants to contribute actively to the attainment of this aim. . . . That is also why she . . . co-operates on a world-wide scale in the maintenance of the convertibility of currencies and in the progressive liberalization of world trade."