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La Légation de Grande-Bretagne à Berne au Département politique

Copie

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Bern, January 14, 1915

His Majesty's Government duly received the Note Verbale on the subject of contraband of war, communicated on the 5th ultimo¹ to the French Ambassador and His Britannic Majesty's Minister. They have noted with satisfaction the measures which Switzerland has taken to prevent re-exportation of contraband goods accompanied by documents indicating a Swiss destination and they observe that the Swiss prohibition list includes most of the articles on the British contraband list.

But the Federal Government will readily understand that no prohibition can be regarded as wholly effective if dispensations are granted in any but the most exceptional cases. They will further admit that the prohibition of the re-exportation of raw material such as copper cannot by itself be regarded as adequate since the price of copper in Germany is sufficiently high to enable the manufactured articles to be exported and melted down for military purposes. This applies equally to such materials as nickel, aluminium and rubber, both as regards the raw material and goods manufactured therefrom, in whatever stage of production, as well as the alloys of the metals named.

The articles in respect of which His Majesty's Government are anxious to see an absolute prohibition imposed are copper, lead, aluminium, haematite iron ore, pig iron, rubber and petroleum.

Where however the Federal Government are unable to impose an absolute prohibition, His Majesty's Government would be satisfied with proper guarantees either from individual firms or from syndicates, for whose bona fides and reliability the Swiss Government would vouch. His Majesty's Government do not of course expect more favourable treatment in respect of prohibitions decreed by the Federal Government than that accorded to other nations.

It would be desirable, should the Federal Government see no objection, that means should be found; to keep either the French Ambassador or His Britannic Majesty's Minister informed privately and unofficially of any dispensations from their prohibitions of the reexportation of contraband articles which the Swiss Government may decide to grant in exceptional circumstances. By such an arrangement they would be in a position to demonstrate that goods on the list of contraband articles which have been allowed by the vessels of the Allied Governments to pass through to Switzerland on the ground that they were bona fide intended to meet the requirements of Swiss internal consumption are not in fact allowed in any way or form to go to countries at war with the Entente Powers.

1. Cf. n° 80.

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Thanks to these measures, which can only increase the mutual feeling of confidence already fortunately existing between the two countries, Switzerland would be safeguarded against unnecessary interference with goods genuinely consigned to Swiss importers for consumption in Switzerland.