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*Lord Robert Cecil au Chef du Département politique, G. Motta*L¹

Londres, 17 février 1921

Dear Monsieur Motta, I trust you will forgive me if I venture to write to you on the subject of the discussion which has arisen between Switzerland and the Council of the League of Nations.² My excuse for doing so is the great interest which I in common with vast masses of my fellow countrymen, feel in the fortunes of the League. I am sure that you will not suspect me of any prejudice or hostility against Switzerland, which as you may know from my past action is very far removed from my point of view.

I have read the report of your speech in the Conseil des Etats³, from which I gather that you maintained in the first place that there was no obligation upon Switzerland, under the Covenant, to permit the passage of international troops through her territory en route to Vilna for the purpose of enabling the proposed plebiscite to be held there under satisfactory conditions. In this contention I respectfully agree. It is plain that there is no obligation under the Covenant for any member of the League to permit a passage of troops, except under article 16, and Switzerland is free from obligation under that article. You next admitted that solidarity of action by the members of the League was desirable. Here again I agree with you; indeed it is plain that, unless the members of the League are prepared for such solidarity, action by the League would be impossible. Finally you informed the Conseil des Etats that on the merits of the case the Conseil Fédéral did not think it desirable that an international contingent should proceed to Vilna, and that therefore they refused to allow their passage through Swiss territory. I hope you will not think me guilty of impertinent interference if I venture to say that this conclusion may cause a great deal of perplexity to the friends of Switzerland in England, and in particular to the very numerous members of the League of Nations Union, of which I am Chairman. And for the following reasons. The Council of the League of Nations is undoubtedly, under the Covenant, charged with the duty of taking executive action on behalf of the League. It has no more important function than to try and bring about the settlement of international disputes. It seems well within the scope of its activities to facilitate the settlement of territorial controversies by a plebiscite. In Switzerland of all countries the use of the referendum should be welcomed. In this particular case, the Council after very mature and prolonged consideration have arranged for a plebiscite to be taken, and as a very obvious and necessary precaution, it decided that it would be best taken under the supervision of an international Police Force. It is of course possible that that decision was wrong, but to the English friends of the League it will certainly appear strange that any member of the League should question that

1. *Cette lettre porte l'en-tête: League of Nations Union. Lord Robert Cecil est délégué britannique à l'assemblée de la SdN.*

2. *A propos de la demande de passage d'un détachement international devant se rendre à Vilna.*

3. *Cf. n° 24.*

decision without very serious grounds. No Society, national or international can exist unless its members are prepared to extend confidence and support to its executive authorities. Had it been suggested that the passage of international troops would inflict danger or disadvantage to Switzerland itself, that matter ought certainly to have been considered by the Council, and Switzerland would have been entitled under the Covenant to become a member of the Council for that purpose. But I do not gather that any such suggestion was made, and I am afraid it may produce a very unfortunate impression in this country, if it is thought that the Conseil Federal simply took upon itself to review and disregard the decision of the Council of the League on a question which was well within the scope of action of the latter body.

I trust that you will not think I have written too plainly, and I would not have done so except that I know you are a sincere friend of the League, and would not willingly do anything to injure its prestige and authority, and I know that in that attitude you are supported by the majority of your fellow-countrymen. It is therefore as one friend of the League to another that I venture to write to you, and if I have in any respect transgressed, I trust you will accept my apologies for having done so.

I propose, unless you see any objection to publish this letter, and any reply you may be good enough to send.⁴

4. *G. Motta répondit, le 26 février 1921, en transmettant à Lord R. Cecil le texte in extenso de son discours au Conseil des Etats du 7 février. Il résume les arguments du Conseil fédéral et relève notamment que [...] dans le cas du conflit polono-lithuanien, le Conseil fédéral a dû constater, à son très grand regret, que l'accord entre la Lithuanie et la Pologne n'était pas complet et que le danger de complications armées, notamment avec la Russie des Soviets, ne pouvait pas être considéré comme exclu.*

Le Conseil fédéral n'a donc pas voulu trancher un principe, mais simplement une espèce. [...] Quant à la question spéciale du plébiscite entre la Lithuanie et la Pologne, elle est maintenant en discussion devant le Conseil de la Société des Nations, où les délégués suisses vont être entendus. J'espère que vous m'approuverez si je vous dis que cette situation m'impose, pour le moment, une grande réserve (E 2001 (B) 8/27).