

Lausanne, October 11, 1978

Dear Mr. Chace,

May I refer to Mr. William Bundy's letter of September 6, 1978, in which he reverted to an old idea of ours, namely, that I would contribute an article on "Switzerland and the United Nations" to one of the forthcoming issues of "Foreign Affairs". Mr. Bundy suggested that I write to you because he would be away for a few weeks in the near future. For your convenience I enclose a photocopy of his letter.

If more than a month has elapsed since I received Mr. Bundy's message, it is because I was unfortunately involved in a traffic accident and sustained some injuries to my back. So I have been in hospital for the last few weeks and shall not resume my professional activities for another month or two.

Quite a few things have happened since I first discussed with Mr. Bundy the issue of our relationship with the United Nations. I do not think that an article on that subject would be timely at present or for some time to come. The situation is roughly as follows:

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Both chambers of our Parliament have over the last twelve months debated the latest report of our government (called, as you know, the Federal Council) on the problem. The Federal Council ended its report by recommending membership of the United Nations as the solution best suiting our national interests. Parliament, and in particular the National Council, i.e. the equivalent of your House of Representatives, has both in committee and in plenary session gone beyond that very cautious formula and insisted that the government submit to Parliament at the earliest convenient moment a formal proposal that Switzerland apply for membership. With some reservations the Council of State (the equivalent of the Senate) has followed suit.

The way may thus seem open for the government to go ahead with the issue. But things are not quite as simple as that. We know for an absolute certainty that a vast segment of our population is dead set against membership of the UN. Furthermore, parliamentary elections will take place in October of next year (Parliament is elected for a four-year term; premature new elections are unknown in our system). This and other considerations have led to a tacit understanding between the political parties which will enable the government to let sleeping dogs lie for the moment, that is to say, not to raise the issue in the very last session of the present Parliament.

This already takes us up to 1980. Then, undoubtedly, the government will submit to Parliament a proposal that Switzerland become a full member of the United Nations. The

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usual procedure will be followed, namely, one Council (which one should be the first has still to be determined) will deal with the subject, first in committee and then in plenary session. Once a carefully worded text is adopted the same procedure will be repeated in the other Council. We assume that a whole year will be required to get through all this. It might take longer if legal issues are raised in this context, for instance, the compatibility of our traditional neutrality with UN membership.

The last and, in a way, most important stage will be the popular vote. According to our Constitution the text of a proposal as it leaves Parliament must be accepted by the majority of the voting citizens but also a majority of our 23 cantons. This vote will take place in 1981 at the earliest or in 1982. Any predictions about the outcome are quite impossible at present.

These rather lengthy remarks are necessary to enable you to make your own choice of the most appropriate moment for an article to appear in "Foreign Affairs". Mr. Bundy says in his letter "the time we would most like to talk about this is after the attitude and possibility have taken shape, and before any concrete action has resulted". I fully share his opinion. The right moment would then be after the end of the parliamentary procedure but well before the popular vote. At that time - in 1981 or 1982 - I shall no longer be a member of the Swiss Foreign Office since I intend to retire some time in 1981. This will give me full freedom of expression and avoid, I hope, what Mr. Bundy in previous comments called a "bland" text, reflecting all the particular care a government official has to take when expressing himself on any important issue of government policy.

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In conclusion, I would say that the time for me to write a paper on the burning and most important question of Switzerland and the United Nations will not come for two or three years. But then, I think, I should be able to make it a valuable contribution to a worthwhile task, namely, setting out the Swiss government's particular difficulties in shaping Swiss foreign policy with the explicit consent of the whole Swiss people.

I presume that it is all right with you if I send copies of this letter to both Mr. Bundy and Mr. Probst, our Ambassador in Washington.

Yours sincerely,