



AMBASSADE D'IRLANDE

BERNE

5.B.2. PR 12/78 (Switzerland) 13th October, 1978/mr

The Secretary,
Department of Foreign Affairs

C O N F I D E N T I A L

17 OCT 1978

Meeting with Mr Pierre Aubert

1. I called on Mr Pierre Aubert, Federal Councillor and Head of the Federal Political Department, on 4th October 1978.

Since his appointment as Foreign Minister last February Mr Aubert has been trying to meet each of the Ambassadors resident in Berne in turn. Those with good reason for seeing him were accorded precedence. Although I indicated to the Chief of Protocol my interest in meeting him before I visited Israel last May and particularly before I returned to Dublin on vacation last June, the Federal Political Department were unable to find time for my call, which was a courtesy call, until 4th October.

2. Mr Aubert, who was formerly a Swiss Parliamentary representative to the Council of Europe, recalled that he had visited Dublin in that capacity when a meeting of the Political Committee of the Council had been convened there. He had liked the city but had not seen much of the countryside. He retained pleasant memories of his visit and hoped that sometime he might return to see a little more of the country. I told him that the Minister for Foreign Affairs had told me that he had spent some time in Switzerland some years ago, as had his wife, and that both looked forward to spending a vacation here at some time in the future but have found that the pressures on the Minister's time make it difficult to realise. When I was leaving Mr Aubert at the end of our talk he asked me to be sure to let him know if my Minister would even be passing by Berne and have a little time to spare.

Neutrality

3. Mr Aubert, who had apparently been briefed on Ireland shortly before my arrival, expressed some surprise that Ireland was a neutral country and yet a member of the European Community. I outlined the position to him explaining our commitment if and when European unity is achieved for the members of the Community. He noted the uniqueness of our position. I commented that at the present stage of political cooperation within the Community we could not be compelled to adopt positions which were unacceptable to us but we could influence the common positions adopted by the Nine on certain political issues.



Bilateral Contacts

4. Mr Aubert then referred to the fact that Switzerland, although neutral, took part in the meetings of the neutral and non-aligned countries and had established regular bilateral contacts with neutrals such as Sweden, Austria and even Yugoslavia. Meetings with these countries took place on an annual basis and views were exchanged on topics of mutual interest. Switzerland found these contacts useful and Mr Aubert said that he wished to have them established with Ireland also. (It might be noted that Switzerland also has regular bilateral contacts with certain Community members - France, Germany, Britain and Italy - and these cover both political and economic matters). In reply I said I felt sure that such contacts would be useful but referred to the extent of the contacts we had with the Nine and the burden that frequent meetings place upon our small resources of personnel. While I have not been approached on this matter by the officials in the Federal Political Department, and believe that the issue was raised by Mr Aubert more or less on the spur of the moment, the Political Division might nevertheless have it examined so that a decision can be taken on whether to pursue the matter here or at least, to fix the line of reply should the matter be raised again.

United Nations

5. The conversation then turned to the United Nations and I enquired whether Mr Aubert considered a recent opinion poll in "Weltwoche" to be a reflection of the real position in Switzerland today. (The poll, which has been conducted on a regular basis since 1970, showed that 49 % were in favour of Swiss membership, 34 % against and 17 % didn't know). Mr Aubert said that in his view the poll overstated the favourable opinion but that it correctly identified the direction in which opinion was moving - towards membership. This movement was all the more surprising since the Federal Council had done nothing whatever since the final report last year and the announcement that they would launch an information campaign. That campaign had not yet started but the public were reacting as if it had! Given the necessity for consultations and discussions within and outside Parliament, the passage of resolutions etc. he did not envisage that the question would come to popular vote before 1980 and possibly not until 1981. And even then the result could well depend on what way the UN voted on some issue the week before the vote - even if 90 % of the people were in favour of membership a vote, such as that on Zionism-Racism, could change that into a negative result in a referendum a week later.

6. Mr Aubert mentioned the Swiss participation in the UN Specialised Agencies and also referred to their continuing part in UN peacekeeping in Korea. I informed him of our role in UN peacekeeping since 1958 and our belief that this had beneficial results, not only for the countries concerned but also for our own Army.

Lebanon

7. The conversation then turned to the then grave situation in the Lebanon which was seriously concerning Mr Aubert. He spoke harshly of the Syrian army's action against areas of Beirut

3003 Berne, le 5 octobre 1972

which held civilian populations and characterised these attacks as "murderous" and the whole attitude of the Syrians as "unacceptable". I remarked that the problem of Lebanon had existed for a long time and appeared to be due to the unwillingness or inability of the different Lebanese groups to reach the compromises which are essential for political stability and development. Mr Aubert accepted this but returned to his own point about the savagery of the artillery barrages. A statement was issued by the Federal Political Department the following day on this question (copy attached).



Ambassador

Les opérations militaires ont causé d'ores et déjà de terribles souffrances aux populations civiles et d'immenses dommages matériels.

Comme, conformément aux Conventions de Genève, le Conseil fédéral tient à rappeler que l'application du droit international humanitaire assure une large protection aux non-combattants comme aux combattants hors de combat. Le respect de ces textes, dans leur lettre et dans leur esprit, permettra d'adoucir le sort d'un peuple pour lequel le peuple suisse ressent une profonde sympathie et dont le malheur n'a que trop duré.

Fidèle aux traditions humanitaires de la Suisse, le Conseil fédéral a décidé d'accepter l'aide déjà apportée aux victimes des événements du Liban. Il a chargé le Département politique fédéral de prendre les dispositions nécessaires à cette fin, en collaboration avec les services d'entraide suisses et internationaux.

CONFÉDÉRATION SUISSE