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*Le Ministre de Suisse à Londres, H. de Torrenté, au Chef de la Division
des Affaires politiques du Département politique, A. Zehnder¹*

L Londres, 14 février 1951

Deux banquiers suisses se sont récemment rendus en Afrique du Sud pour y étudier les possibilités d'y créer une succursale. Du rapport², dont les conclusions sont d'ailleurs négatives sur ce point pour des considérations plus bancaires qu'économiques, j'extrais quelques passages qui ont retenu mon attention:

«The main problem of South Africa is that of increasing its white population sufficiently for it to hold the balance in the years to come with an increased pressure from the native population for a larger share in the wealth of the country. It will be impossible in the long run to continue to keep the native population to its present low standard of living and it will become necessary to grant them at least some measure of political rights. Unfortunately, the present Government³ does not seem to take any special steps for an increased immigration. Most welcome are immigrants from Holland, Scandinavia and Germany, of protestant faith.

On the other hand, we have made the racial problem a subject of almost every conversation with many people of high standing and different trends of thought, including the honorary Consul General and the Consul of Switzerland⁴, both of which have spent almost all their life in the Union of South Africa. Contrary to what is the opinion very often heard abroad, namely that the racial issue may give rise to revolutionary outbreaks in South Africa, we did not find anybody who appeared to be afraid of the use of force or violence on the part of the natives in the near future. Everybody agrees that the problem will need careful handling and that it may lead to local disturbances from time to time. There is no easy short cut to solve such a complicated situation, and the immediate granting of full political rights and proclamation of social equality is entirely out of the question for the time being. The natives themselves are by no means united and are economically so weak that it would be most difficult for them to engage in concerted action against the whites for any length of time. It is therefore considered that the native problem, difficult as it may be, does not present an explosive character as things stand at present.

1. Lettre signée, au nom du Ministre H. de Torrenté, par E. Bernath.

2. Le rapport original n'a pu être retrouvé. Les papiers de la Légation de Suisse à Londres (E 2200.40(-)1968/126/10) ne contiennent qu'une copie de la lettre du 14 février. Malgré les recherches entreprises, il n'a pas été possible d'identifier les deux banquiers suisses dont il est question.

3. Formé par D. Malan, chef du Parti national, après sa victoire électorale de mai 1948 sur J. Smuts.

4. Respectivement Ch. Diethelm et O. Berchtold.

It should also be remembered that the native problem presents vastly different aspects throughout the African Continent:

In North Africa, the political and economic history of the native populations has been closely linked for thousands of years with the corresponding developments of the Mediterranean countries and will in all probability continue to do so.

In Central Africa, even today, the truly colonial system prevails and the Belgian Congo⁵ with its immense territories, its native population of 15'000'000 blacks and only 60'000 whites (of which 10–15'000 priests) may be cited as a typical example. Here, the white man comes out as an administrator either for the State or for private commercial or industrial enterprises, but only for a limited number of years with the definite intention to return to Europe sooner or later. Here, people quite openly admit that one day when a sufficiently large elite of natives has been formed they will either take over the government of the country or at least ask for equality within the framework of some <Union>.

As against this, the important number of 2'500'000 whites in South Africa strongly feel that they are not foreigners in a native country, but that South Africa is predominantly theirs with a native population whose presence is admitted but who have no claim to own the country or to direct its destiny. South Africans of Dutch and French origin in particular feel that they have only one home, namely South Africa and that Holland or France are as much foreign to them as any other country in the world. They do not, therefore, admit for one moment the idea of walking out of South Africa as the British did in India or the Dutch in Indonesia. Before anything like that could happen they would fight to the last and the natives in South Africa know this very well.

These distinctions should be clearly realised when discussing the native problem of the African Continent as a whole.

The leaders of the country, or at least those with whom we have come into contact, have impressed us favourably. They are no doubt sincere and capable men, but they may be lacking in political maturity. In particular, their public utterances on the subject of racial problems have not been very happy and have given them a bad name abroad. Moreover, the attitude of the South African representatives at the United Nations in the debates regarding South West Africa, has also antagonised public opinion abroad⁶.

5. En 1950, un consortium de banques suisses sous la direction de la SBS et du Crédit suisse a émis un emprunt de 60 millions de francs à 4% en faveur du Congo belge, avec la garantie de l'Etat belge. Un deuxième emprunt du même montant est émis par le même syndicat bancaire en 1951. Cf. E 2001(E)1967/113/700, E 6100(B)1972/96/21 et E 7110(-)1967/32/49.
6. En 1946, après la disparition de la Société des Nations, le gouvernement sud-africain rejette la recommandation de l'Assemblée de l'ONU de placer son mandat sur le Sud-Ouest africain sous la tutelle des Nations Unies. En 1949, Prétoria informe l'ONU qu'elle ne transmettrait plus de renseignements sur ce territoire. En 1950, dans un avis consultatif, la Cour internationale de Justice estime que l'Afrique du Sud garde ses obligations internationales découlant du mandat de la SdN. Après le rejet par Prétoria de cet avis, l'Assemblée

While the picture has favourable and unfavourable aspects, it would seem that in the present troubled conditions of the world and the probable dangers ahead, especially for Europe, that South Africa enjoying as it does a very favourable geographical position, can be considered as a good country for investment for many years ahead, at least 10 to 15 years, but the evolution of the population problem will require careful watching.»⁷

de l'ONU constituée en décembre 1950, un comité ad hoc de 5 membres, chargé de négocier avec les autorités sud-africaines. Cf. E 2200.178(-)1979/103/4.

7. Sur les investissements suisses déjà effectués en Afrique du Sud, cf. Nos 14 et 45 dans le présent volume.