

Article

Switzerland–Ireland. The Diplomatic Relations of Two Island Nations 1918–1992

Jonas Hirschi

Abstract

Ireland and Switzerland are two island nations: While Ireland is a geographical island, Switzerland is a political one. Despite this – or perhaps precisely because of it – the two states pursue different foreign policies. This is also evident in bilateral relations: Even before it became a state, Ireland tried to establish contact with Switzerland through clandestine diplomacy, which the latter tried to prevent. It was only with the opening of the respective diplomatic missions and the end of the Second World War that bilateral relations could be normalised. Nevertheless, inter-state relations remained superficial during the Cold War and were mainly characterised by an absence of bilateral visits. It was not until Ireland took over the presidency of the European Community in 1984 and 1990 that Swiss interest in Ireland increased. It is, however, precisely because relations between Ireland and Switzerland were so conflict-free and superficial that they paint an authentic picture of the foreign policy of the two states.

Zusammenfassung

Irland und die Schweiz sind Inselstaaten: Irland ist eine geografische Insel, die Schweiz eine politische. Trotzdem – oder vielleicht gerade deshalb – verfolgen die beiden Staaten eine unterschiedliche Aussenpolitik. Dies zeigt sich auch in den bilateralen Beziehungen: Irland versuchte noch vor der Staatsgründung mit einer klandestinen Diplomatie Kontakt zur Schweiz aufzubauen, was diese zu verhindern versuchte. Erst mit der Eröffnung der jeweiligen diplomatischen Vertretungen und dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs normalisierten sich die bilateralen Beziehungen. Dennoch blieben die zwischenstaatlichen Beziehungen im Kalten Krieg oberflächlich und waren hauptsächlich durch das Ausbleiben von bilateralen Besuchen gekennzeichnet. Erst als Irland 1984 und 1990 die Präsidentschaft der EG übernahm, nahm das Interesse der Schweiz an Irland zu. Doch gerade, weil die Beziehungen zwischen Irland und der Schweiz so konfliktfrei und oberflächlich gestaltet waren, zeichnen sie ein authentisches Bild der Aussenpolitik der beiden Staaten.

[Jonas Hirschi](#), *1993, M.A., Historian, Researcher at the Dodis research centre since 2020, PhD candidate at the University of Bern.

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Switzerland–Ireland.

The Diplomatic Relations of Two Island Nations 1918–1992¹

Jonas Hirschi

Ireland and Switzerland are island nations. This is an obvious statement concerning the former, but it is surprising for the latter. The definition of an island in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary states: «An Island is a tract of land surrounded by water and smaller than a continent.»² Clearly, the Irish island fits this definition.³ Nevertheless, there is a second part of the definition of an island in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary: «An Island is something resembling an island especially in its isolated or surrounded position.»⁴ This atypical definition is remarkable and leads us to Switzerland. The map of Europe is brought to mind, showing Switzerland resembling an island in its isolated position surrounded by EU members. Switzerland manages to be both as centrally located as possible while at the same time being isolated. In an excellent work,⁵ Swiss historian André Holenstein locates the beginning of this double-track discourse in the 15th century. At that time, Switzerland's identity would have first begun to form by intertwining and differentiating itself from its surroundings. Since then, its strategies for its continued existence have been characterised by «participation and separation, inclusion and enclosure, integration and isolation.»⁶ Precisely because Switzerland was situated in the middle of Europe, surrounded by threatening great powers, and without its own uniform language, culture or confession, discursive isolation combined with simultaneous actual integration has been its survival strategy. In the late 17th century, this isolationist thinking became accentuated and Holenstein describes the self-perception of Switzerland as a «comparatively prosperous island of peace in the middle of a Europe of war and misery.»⁷ Yet Switzerland's island existence is probably most evident in the First World War,⁸ when Switzerland was actually depicted as an island on propaganda postcards. The images with cliffs and lighthouses are strongly reminiscent of the pictorial representation of Ireland. The description of Switzerland as an island was used again during the Second World War. Federal Councillor Philipp Etter even invoked the image in a conversation with the Irish envoy, Francis Cremins, at the New Year's reception in 1942: «Ireland had always been an island, and now, Switzerland had become an island.»⁹

The history of Ireland is strongly influenced by the fact that it is an actual island. As an isolated island, Ireland was not a stretch of land that was crossed

¹ Many thanks to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback and constructive criticism, which has been incorporated into this article.

² Definition of Island, in: [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#).

³ It must be noted that the Irish island is divided by two nations: the Republic of Ireland, on the one hand, and the six counties in the north on the other hand, which are part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In this paper, we focus on the Republic of Ireland and thus only on one part of the Irish island. Despite this partition, the Republic of Ireland is considered an island nation.

⁴ Definition of Island, in: [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#).

⁵ André Holenstein: *Mitten in Europa. Verflechtung und Abgrenzung in der Schweizer Geschichte*, Baden 2014.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁸ See Georg Kreis: *Insel der unsicheren Geborgenheit. Die Schweiz in den Kriegsjahren 1914–1918*, Zürich 2014.

⁹ See the letter from the Irish Legation in Bern to the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs (DEA), Joseph P. Walshe, 7 January 1942, dodis.ch/67084.



Switzerland as an island on a military postcard from 1914, VBS/DDPS – X. Wehrli, doi.org/10.1017/dodis.ch/68451.

by chance, but rather an area that was intentionally reached and settled. Irish Historian John Gibney noted in his short history of Ireland: «The sea did not isolate Ireland; rather, it offered innumerable pathways to a wider world.»¹⁰ Therefore, because Ireland was separated from other islands and from the continent, it sought much greater interconnectedness with other states. Taoiseach Éamon de Valera referred to that in a speech in St. Gallen at a celebration of the Irish missionary Saint Gallus (who is the namesake of the Swiss city) on 16 Oc-

¹⁰ John Gibney: A short history of Ireland, London 2017, p. 3.

tober 1951: «Although our home is a small island separated from the Continent of Europe by formidable seas, the Irish have never been an insular people.»¹¹ However, not only was there this wilful rapprochement with other states, but Ireland was also forced by its strategic location to mentally abandon insularity, as Irish historian Michael Kennedy put it. Irish governments knew «that Ireland was not an isolated island behind an island off the coast of Europe, but a potential strategic centrepiece» and this awareness «dominated Irish foreign policy in the twentieth century.»¹²

On the one hand, therefore, we have a *de facto* island, which sought close relations with other places and thus negated its insularity, and, on the other hand, a self-designated discursive island, which mentally sought insularity because of its centrally located position and close network with foreign countries. These different approaches are also reflected in the foreign policy of the respective states.

Switzerland's foreign policy was treated poorly in the first decades after the founding of the federal state. The Head of the Federal Political Department (FPD) responsible for foreign policy usually changed every year, the network of representations was very sparse and Federal Councillors did not travel abroad at all. Until the First World War, the Federal Council was even of the opinion that Switzerland, as a small state, had no foreign policy at all.¹³ As late as 1964, Swiss historian Herbert Lüthy observed the absence of a Swiss foreign policy: «No other country is so strictly and permanently committed to a foreign policy position – to abstain from foreign policy, so to speak – as Switzerland.»¹⁴ One could even argue that the absence of a foreign policy was a state-building factor for Switzerland. Not so for Ireland: Ireland was aware of the importance of foreign policy early on. And even before becoming an official state, Ireland had a clandestine foreign policy.

The First Diplomatic Steps 1918–1939

On 21 January 1919, when the Dáil met for the first time, it adopted not only the Declaration of Independence but also *A Message to the Free Nations of The World*.¹⁵ Consequently, a diplomatic document was the second earliest document of the Irish state, demonstrating the importance of foreign policy for Ireland. In fact, Ireland turned to diplomatic service even before it became a state.¹⁶ With no experience in diplomacy and no trained envoys, the Republicans set up a clandestine diplomacy.

One of the first secret diplomats of Ireland was Patrick McCartan.¹⁷ He was sent to Washington in 1917 to get Ireland invited to the Paris Peace Conference.

¹¹ Tentative outline of the speech by Taoiseach Éamon de Valera at St. Gallen, October 1951, University College Dublin Archives (UCDA), UCDA#P150/3020.

¹² Michael Kennedy: «Irish Foreign Policy. 1919 to 1973», in: Thomas Bartlett (Ed.): *The Cambridge History of Ireland* (Volume IV), Cambridge 2018, p. 605. Kennedy's statement was completely contrasted by Swiss Ambassador Charles Hummel some years earlier in 1988: «Ireland is 'doubly insular': an island behind an island, at the very edge of Europe. This gives rise to a natural tendency to cut off, to intravision, to neutrality.» See dodis.ch/67076.

¹³ Georg Kreis: «Aussenpolitik», in: *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz* (HLS).

¹⁴ Herbert Lüthy: «Die Schweiz als Antithese», in: *ibid.*, *Gesammelte Werke*, (vol. III), Zürich 2003, pp. 410–430, here p. 426.

¹⁵ The next two chapters are a summary of my article for *Irish Studies in International Affairs*. See Jonas Hirschi: «The Missing Recognition. How Ireland and Switzerland Established Diplomatic Relations», in: *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 2023, pp. 175–192, <https://doi.org/10.1353/isia.0.a906620>.

¹⁶ See also Bernadette Whelan: «Recognition of the Irish Free State, 1924: The Diplomatic Context to the Appointment of Timothy Smiddy as the First Irish Minister to the US», in: *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 26 (2015), pp. 121–125.

¹⁷ See Marie Coleman: «Patrick McCartan», in: *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.3318/dib.005575.v1>.

One of McCartan's attempts shows that he was an «envoy by accident»:¹⁸ He wanted to secure an invitation to the Paris Peace Conference from the German government – and thus from the war losers, who in the end were themselves not allowed to attend the conference. Since Switzerland represented Germany's diplomatic interests in the United States, McCartan turned to Hans Sulzer, the Swiss envoy in Washington, on 2 December 1918. The latter did not think to forward McCartan's letter to the Germans and, in a letter to the President of the Swiss Confederation described the Irish project as «of no practical significance, of course».¹⁹

Even after Ireland's declaration of independence, Swiss authorities did not respond to Irish letters. Ireland's quest for independence continued to be regarded as an internal British matter by the Swiss. Ireland, on the other hand, continued to seek diplomatic relations with Switzerland. The Dáil's Report on Foreign Affairs of 19 August 1919 emphasised the importance of Switzerland as a «useful centre» for propaganda activities within Central Europe.²⁰ A suitable person for this task was found in Count Gerald Edward O'Kelly de Gallagher et Tycooly, who was appointed by the acting President Arthur Griffith as Irish agent to Switzerland,²¹ thus becoming the first Irish representative to Switzerland. Count O'Kelly, who came from a family with a history in diplomacy, proceeded very cautiously in Bern, and did not act in any way as a secret propaganda agent. Instead, he informed Walter Thurnheer, Adjunct of the Division of Foreign Affairs, very openly of his plans. Despite this cautious approach, the FPD rejected O'Kelly's plan. In 1921, Michael MacWhite was appointed as O'Kelly de Gallagher et Tycooly's successor.²² Two years later – after Ireland's admission to the League of Nations –, he also became the first official Irish representative in Switzerland as Ireland's representative at the League of Nations after having spent two years in Switzerland as a clandestine diplomat.

Switzerland itself, which could already look back on seventy years of experience as a nation-state, did not display a much more elaborate form of diplomacy towards Ireland during this period. As Switzerland had no diplomatic representative on the Irish island during the War of Independence, a journalist had to act as a de facto diplomat: Walther Weibel, correspondent for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ), travelled to Ireland in May of 1920 to report for the newspaper. He also provided a confidential report for the Swiss envoy in London. According to this report, Weibel met four members of the Sinn Féin cabinet and received a memorandum signed by acting President Griffith, which he was asked to pass on to the Swiss government. This memorandum was a proposal by the Irish government for Switzerland to open a consulate in Dublin. Weibel sent the document to the Swiss envoy in London, Charles Paravicini, on 27 May 1920 describing the memorandum as a strange document.²³ The Swiss government did not react to Griffith's proposal, even though there was quite a significant Swiss settlement on the Irish island. The first complete census on the Irish island in 1901 shows 266 individuals who described Switzerland as their country of origin. This made the Swiss diaspora in Ireland the eighth

¹⁸ Michael Kennedy: Irish foreign policy, p. 607.

¹⁹ See the letter from the Swiss envoy in Washington, Hans Sulzer, to the President of the Confederation Felix Calonder, 7 December 1918, dodis.ch/63649.

²⁰ Documents on Irish Foreign Policy (DIFP), vol. 1, doc. 22, <https://www.difp.ie/volume-1/1919/report-on-foreign-affairs/22/>.

²¹ Michael Kennedy: «O'Kelly de Gallagher et Tycooly, Gerald Edward», in: Dictionary of Irish Biography, <https://doi.org/10.3318/dib.006843.v1>.

²² Michael Kennedy: «MacWhite, Michael», in: Dictionary of Irish Biography, <https://doi.org/10.3318/dib.005299.v1>.

²³ See the letter from Walther Weibel to the Swiss envoy in London, Charles Paravicini, 27 May 1920, dodis.ch/63651.

largest colony.²⁴ Yet Switzerland's main concern around the Irish question was the threat to friendly relations with Great Britain. It is therefore not surprising that the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 6 December 1921 – the point in time when Great Britain recognised the Irish Free State – was the decisive turning point in Switzerland's perception of Ireland. After the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed, it took another year for it to come into force. Switzerland was informed of the establishment of the Irish Free State as a Dominion of the British Empire by a note from Foreign Minister Lord Curzon on 22 December 1922. Consequently, the Swiss Legation in London stated on 20 April 1923: «As a result of the Treaty between Ireland and Great Britain on 5 December 1921, Ireland became a self-governing dominion, no longer part of the Kingdom, but simply a member of the British Empire, along with Newfoundland, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa.»²⁵

While Switzerland became aware of Ireland's independence, there has never been a formal decision by the government to recognise Ireland as a state. This is quite remarkable considering that the Federal Council formally recognised other states that had gained their independence after the First World War. There are two probable reasons for this: firstly, as a dominion, Ireland did not achieve total independence in 1921 and remained part of the Commonwealth and thus part of the British Crown. For example, there was no formal recognition of Canada by Switzerland in 1867 either. Secondly, Ireland was the only state to gain its independence from a victorious nation after the First World War and not from a defeated nation or from post-revolution Russia.

Although there was no formal recognition of Ireland in 1921, we can observe a *de facto* recognition, a silent recognition, of Ireland by Switzerland. From December 1921 onwards Swiss authorities responded to Irish requests and showed themselves cooperative.

Interest in Switzerland also increased from the Irish side. In August 1921, an Irish Bureau was opened in Geneva under the direction of Michael MacWhite.²⁶ In June 1922, the Department of External Affairs (DEA) stated that Geneva would be the best location in Europe as it would be «the real centre of convergence of international democratic effort, overt and concealed».²⁷ Additionally, Geneva had the decisive advantage for the young state that it was a cost-effective option to establish contact with over 50 states and to open and maintain only one mission for this purpose.²⁸ MacWhite's mission to secure Ireland's membership of the League of Nations was successful. On 10 September 1923 Cosgrave delivered his Admission Speech to the General Assembly of the League of Nations.²⁹ The Irish Bureau in Geneva became the Permanent Delegation of Ireland to the League of Nations and the second official Irish representation after the mission in London. Switzerland accepted the official Irish representation, requested notification of MacWhite's appointment as representative through diplomatic channels and granted him diplomatic privileges and immunities.³⁰

24 After those from the British Empire, Russia, the United States, France, Germany, Norway and Italy. The 1911 census also shows Switzerland as one of the largest countries of origin of the Irish population outside the British Empire. See <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>. The Swiss colony was mainly based in Dublin and Belfast, practised different professions and had a high level of literacy.

25 See the note from the Swiss Legation in London, 20 April 1923, dodis.ch/63741.

26 DIFP, vol. 1, doc. 277, <https://www.difp.ie/volume-1/1922/foreign-policy-general/277/>.

27 DIFP, vol. 1, doc. 299, <https://www.difp.ie/volume-1/1922/foreign-policy-general/299/>.

28 See Michael Kennedy: *Irish Foreign Policy*, p. 609, and John Gibney, Michael Kennedy, Kate O'Malley: *A Voice Among the Nations*, Dublin 2019, p. 35.

29 DIFP, vol. 2, doc. 118, <https://www.difp.ie/volume-2/1923/admission-speech-to-league-of-nations/454/>.

30 See the letter from the Foreign Affairs Division of the Federal Political Department (FPD) to

Even though the representation was not accredited in Bern, the Irish delegate in Geneva, as well as the Ministers who visited the League of Nations, now also came into frequent contact with the Swiss government, establishing a first unofficial diplomatic channel between Dublin and Bern. 12

Switzerland took up the question of establishing a consulate in Ireland again in 1933 while discussing how it could better structure its consular network on the British Isles. The FPD preferred Dublin to other cities for political and economic reasons. The Federal Council decided to establish a consulate general in Dublin on 26 June 1934 and shortly after appointed Carl Josef Benziger, a Catholic and a historian, as the first Swiss Consul General in Ireland.³¹ 13

**The Establishment
of Legations and
«The Emergency»
1939–1945**

General Consul Benziger's evaluation of his first three years in Dublin was extremely critical. Despite great efforts, economic relations had not been improved and political relations with Switzerland were not of an intensity to justify such an expensive post. However, Benziger did not go so far as to recommend abolishing the post, but rather suggested a reorganisation. In Switzerland, there was also no thought of abolishing the Consulate General. On the contrary: on 24 March 1939, the Federal Council decided to transform the Consulate General in Dublin into a diplomatic Legation.³² This step provoked scepticism in the parliament.³³ The Social Democrats argued that numerous countries had priority over Ireland.³⁴ Presumably, the Social Democrats' rejection of the Consulate in Dublin's evaluation was primarily linked to the person of Carl Benziger. They wanted to prevent the conservative from being promoted to *Chargé d'affaires*.³⁵ Nevertheless, the liberal parliamentarian Theodor Gut considered a rejection of the Federal Council's proposal to be a big mistake, since Ireland, as a young state, would be very «prestige-sensitive». The Catholic conservative Federal Councillor Giuseppe Motta then took the floor as Head of the FPD and strongly defended the creation of a Legation in Dublin: «As for Dublin, we are faced with a people who want to assert their desire for independence with a tenacious will. Do we, the Swiss, have any reason to begrudge a country like Ireland, the generous Ireland?»³⁶ The Federal Council's proposal was accepted by 78 votes to 19, thus Switzerland's first diplomatic representation in Ireland came into being and Benziger became the first *Chargé d'affaires* in Dublin. 14

The Irish government welcomed this step warmly and proposed the establishment of an Irish Legation in Bern in October 1940 as a substitute for representation at the League of Nations. According to Switzerland's protocol practice, double accreditation of representatives in Bern to the League of Nations 15

the Irish Free State representative to the League of Nations, Michael MacWhite, 15 August 1923, Swiss Federal Archives (CH-BAR), CH-BAR#E2001B#1000/1508#381* (B.56.41.05.7). Historian Peter Moser located the recognition of Ireland at this time: «In 1922, Switzerland recognised the Free State of Ireland with its entry into the League of Nations.» See Peter Moser: «Ireland», in: [HLS](#).

³¹ See the Minutes of the Federal Council No. 1305, 13 July 1934, CH-BAR#E1004.1#1000/9#13012*.

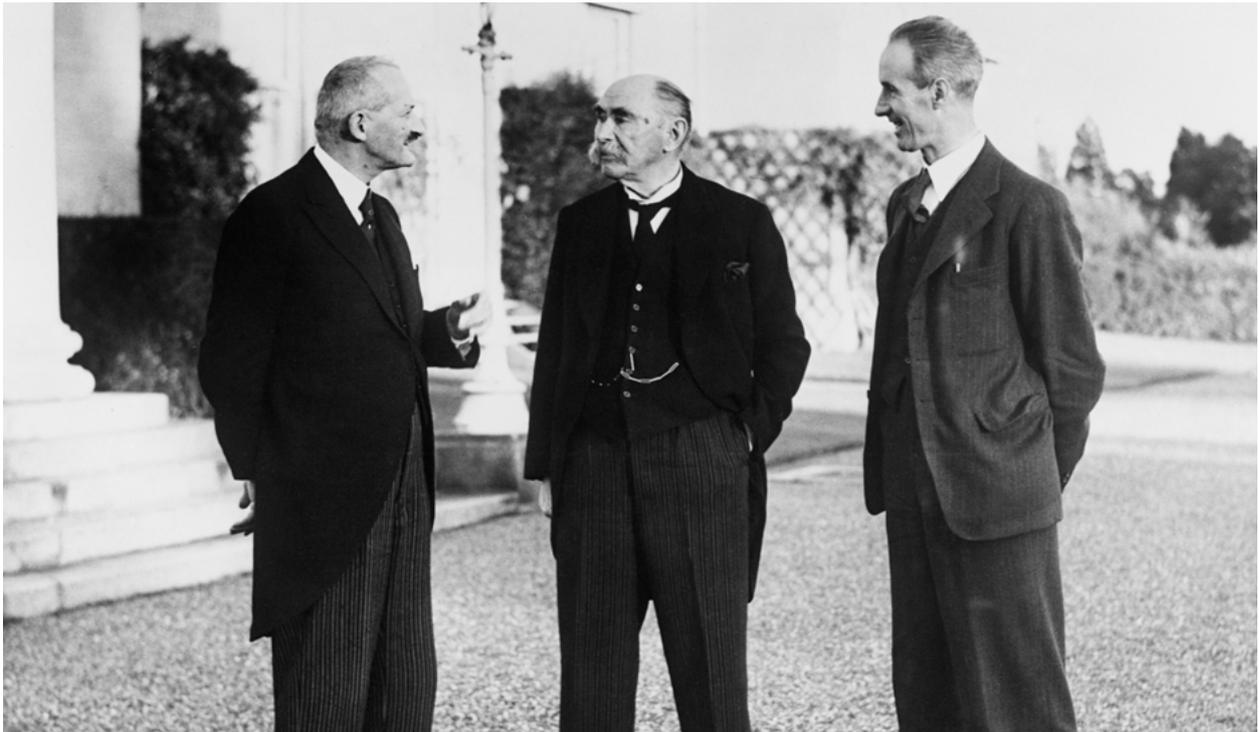
³² Since the establishment of a diplomatic representation serves as a de facto recognition of a state, one might expect considerations in the Minutes of the Federal Council or in the Message to the parliament corresponding to the recognition of Ireland. However, the Federal Council's Minutes only state that a need that had been felt for a long time was being considered. See the Minutes of the Federal Council No. 618, 24 March 1939, CH-BAR#E1004.1#1000/9#13481*. The message to parliament then just showed that a Legation costs Switzerland as much as a Consulate, see [dodis.ch/65907](#).

³³ This was the first parliamentary debate in Switzerland that was really about Ireland as a state. Otherwise, Ireland was almost exclusively mentioned in connection with the purchase of remounts (horses for the military).

³⁴ For the parliamentary debate see [dodis.ch/65908](#).

³⁵ See the note from the Division of Administrative Services of the FPD, 26 January 1953, [dodis.ch/10408](#).

³⁶ See [dodis.ch/65908](#).



Swiss Envoy, Carl Josef Benziger, with the Irish President Douglas Hyde and the Secretary to the President, Michael McDunphy, in front of the residence of the Irish President in Dublin, Áras an Uachtaráin, somewhen between 1939 and 1945, dodis.ch/68736.

was permissible, only a contrary approach was rejected. In addition, there were discussions during the war about relocating the headquarters of the League of Nations to another country anyway. The Irish government's memorandum again put forward the central position of Switzerland in Europe. And that «the national character and traditions of her people give her a position of leadership among the small nations of the world.»³⁷

In the Dáil, the proposal was discussed on 2 October 1940 and, unlike in Switzerland, was not controversial.³⁸ Consequently, the Irish delegate to the League of Nations in Geneva, Francis Cremins, moved to Bern in 1940 and became Ireland's first envoy Switzerland. 16

Of course, the beginning of the two diplomatic missions was strongly influenced by World War II. The main activity of the two Legations during the war was reporting on the war situation on the ground and to prepare for the case that their respective country became actively involved. The reports from both Legations always placed an emphasis on neutrality, which had been explicitly requested by the Irish Foreign Ministry.³⁹ 17

This is the first time that the different assessments of neutrality in the host country became apparent, as they would remain for the next few years. As early as 11 September 1939, Cremins reported: «It is clear that all steps have been taken by the authorities to carry out and maintain the policy of the strict- 18

³⁷ DIFP, vol. 6, doc. 310, <https://www.difp.ie/volume-6/1940/establishment-of-legation-in-berne/3310>.

³⁸ It is worth noting, that de Valera explained that many Irish people travelled to Switzerland for health purposes. Perhaps he was also alluding to his personal situation. De Valera underwent eye surgery in Zurich in 1936, see UCDA#P150/102.

³⁹ Secret note of the DEA, 19 November 1940, dodis.ch/67091.

est neutrality.»⁴⁰ Benziger's assessment 6 days later was quite different. In his opinion, Ireland's neutrality depended «on the goodwill of England.»⁴¹

In fact, Switzerland's armed neutrality during the Second World War became a model for Ireland. Benziger wrote to Bern that General Guisan's speech on the Swiss National Day on 1 August 1940 was quoted in all Irish Papers with the wish that «Ireland would take an example from Switzerland, which was determined to fight and hold out in the event of an invasion.»⁴²

These wartime reports focused on neutrality and wartime measures mostly obtained their information from public sources. Furthermore, in addition to these reports, there were few meetings between the diplomatic representatives and the governments of their host countries. De Valera very rarely appeared before the foreign representatives, as Benziger noted, but there was the opportunity for an exchange on ceremonial occasions. At the New Year's meeting in 1941, de Valera revealed himself to be an «admirer» of Switzerland. Together they discussed the danger of war for their respective countries.⁴³

Due to the wartime situation – or «The Emergency» as this period is known in Ireland – the first years of diplomatic missions were exceptional. Bilateral issues were obsolete, and representatives were busy reading newspaper reports, analysing speeches and interacting with other diplomatic representatives in their respective host countries. Only after the war would diplomatic relations begin to normalise.

The Normalisation of Diplomatic Relations 1945–1962

In 1946, Walter Adolf von Burg replaced Carl Benziger. Von Burg observed as an envoy the establishment of the Irish Republic and the complete Irish breakaway from the Commonwealth in 1949. He suggested that the President of the Swiss Confederation, Ernst Nobs, congratulate Irish President, Séan O'Kelly, on the establishment of the Republic. The FPD expressed caution according to the pattern established during the Irish struggle for independence. The Department asked the Swiss representation in London to find out how the British Foreign Office would react to such congratulations. Only once London had not raised any objection did President Nobs formally congratulate Irish President O'Kelly. This consultation with London on the nature of the Irish Statute would be the last of its kind, as Switzerland henceforth regarded the Irish Republic as a fully recognised independent state.

Since various agreements that Switzerland had already concluded with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in the 19th century were also valid for the Irish Free State, the first agreements that were explicitly concluded between Ireland and Switzerland dealt with rather marginal issues and were based on other agreements that Switzerland had already concluded with other countries.⁴⁴ The first agreement that was specifically negotiated between Ireland and Switzerland was a trade agreement. Switzerland had concluded trade agreements with every country in Europe – with the exception of Ireland, as

⁴⁰ See the report of the Irish Mission in Geneva, 11 September 1939, [DFA/4/2/219/7](#).

⁴¹ See the report of the Swiss Legation in Dublin, 17 September 1939, [dodis.ch/67092](#).

⁴² See the report of the Swiss Legation in Dublin, 7 August 1940, [dodis.ch/67094](#).

⁴³ See the report of the Swiss Legation in Dublin, 4 January 1941, [dodis.ch/67095](#).

⁴⁴ Just one year after the end of the war, Ireland approached Switzerland for the conclusion of an aviation agreement. Switzerland, for its part, showed interest in such an agreement because Shannon Airport was considered an important stage for the connecting routes to the USA, see the Minutes of the Federal Council No. 2254, 6 October 1947, [dodis.ch/1601](#). Switzerland took the initiative for the second bilateral agreement, the «stagiaires» agreement, which allowed persons under the age of 30 to obtain a work and residence permit for a period of one year, regardless of labour market conditions. The interest in Ireland was due to the fact that not all Swiss trainees who wanted to learn English could be accommodated in the United Kingdom, see the Minutes of the Federal Council No. 2846, 17 December 1948, [dodis.ch/67096](#), and the circular of the Federal Office for Industry, Trade and Labor of the FDEA, 7 October 1949, [dodis.ch/8159](#).

the Head of the Division of Commerce of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs (FDEA), Minister Hans Schaffner, noted in a conversation with the Irish envoy in Bern, William Warnock. Schaffner was therefore delighted to be invited by the Irish Foreign Trade Committee to talks in Dublin in summer 1951 with the aim of concluding a trade agreement.⁴⁵ The proposal of the FDEA to the Federal Council to open economic negotiations with Ireland, however, demonstrated little enthusiasm and showed that Switzerland merely wanted to start negotiations as a matter of courtesy. It was clear to the Department that Ireland only wanted the greatest possible economic independence from England and, therefore, sought a trade agreement with Switzerland.⁴⁶

The negotiations took place from 30 October to 1 November 1951 at the headquarters of the Irish Foreign Office, in Iveagh House in Dublin. This was probably the first bilateral meeting of high officials between Ireland and Switzerland. The Swiss delegation consisted of Schaffner and Hans Bühler from the Division of Commerce, as well as von Burg and Adolf Gygax from the Swiss Legation. The Irish delegation was led by the Legal Adviser to the DEA, William Patrick Fay, and included nine people from the Departments of External Affairs, Finance, Agriculture, Industry and Commerce, as well as the Department of the Taoiseach. The Irish side had prepared a draft agreement that proposed a very free import regime. The agreement, therefore, corresponded with Swiss ideals, and so the three-day negotiations focused mainly on the precise handling of various trade goods. It was agreed that the agreement to promote trade should be concluded in the form of an exchange of notes. The drafted notes were accepted by the two governments and the trade agreement came into force.⁴⁷

Schaffner did not overplay the agreement and in an analysis a year later, he saw the main benefit of the trade agreement as the fact that due to the negotiations, official contacts have been finally established with Irish authorities: «Personal contacts made in times when trade is flowing nicely are often very valuable if difficulties arise in later years.»⁴⁸

With the conclusion of these agreements the authorities met for the first time, but there were still no official meetings of Ministers – despite the fact that an Irish Minister had actually travelled to Switzerland a few years earlier. Foreign Minister Sean MacBride travelled to Switzerland in December 1949, but the main reason for his trip was to sign the Geneva Red Cross Convention rather than to discuss bilateral issues. There must have been a short conversation with the Head of the FPD, Federal Councillor Max Petitpierre,⁴⁹ in Bern but in truth, MacBride saw Bern simply as a necessary stopover on his journey between Paris and Rome.⁵⁰ Éamon de Valera, who travelled as Irish President to Zurich for an eye operation in 1936, paid another visit to Switzerland in 1951, now as Taoiseach. The reason, however, was to celebrate the 1300th anniversary of the death of Saint Gallus. During this visit, de Valera met Federal Councillor Etter in St. Gallen and Federal Councillor Petitpierre in Bern for brief ceremo-

⁴⁵ See the letter from the Irish envoy in Bern, William Warnock, to the Secretary of the DEA, Sean Nunan, 2 August 1951, National Archives of Ireland (IE-NA), IE-NA#DFA/5/314/10/12.

⁴⁶ See the Minutes of the Federal Council No. 2027, 23 October 1951, dodis.ch/67097.

⁴⁷ See the minutes from the Irish side, dodis.ch/63875. As this was only an agreement in principle, there were further discussions on promoting trade between Ireland and Switzerland in the following years.

⁴⁸ See the letter from Irish envoy Warnock to Secretary Nunan, 4 January 1952, IE-NA#DFA/5/314/10/12.

⁴⁹ The Head of the FPD, Federal Councillor Max Petitpierre, mentioned the talk in a meeting with Irish envoy Warnock, see letter from Minister Warnock to the DEA, 27 October 1950, IE-NA#DFA/10/2/32.

⁵⁰ DIFP, vol. 9, doc. 394, difp.ie/volume-9/1949/the-opening-of-the-holy-door/4994/.



Taoiseach de Valera with Federal Councillor Etter at the celebration of the 1300th anniversary of the death of Saint Gallus, 16 October 1951 in St. Gallen. Also in the picture: the Apostolic Nuncio, Monsignore Filippo Bernardini, dodis.ch/68447.



Taoiseach de Valera with Federal Councillor Petitpierre in the Von-Wattenwyl-Haus in Bern, 18 October 1951, dodis.ch/68737.

nial talks.⁵¹ Later, in 1956, the Irish President Séan O’Kelly travelled to Switzerland. This event was described in retrospect by the FPD as a state visit and a «milestone» in Irish-Swiss relations.⁵² Nevertheless, documentation of this visit cannot be found in the files of the Federal Archives. There is, however, an article about it in the *Irish Times* archive: apparently O’Kelly was simply on holiday in Wengen in 1956.⁵³ This can, therefore, neither be seen as a state visit nor as a milestone for Irish-Swiss relations. In the other direction, even fewer visits are recorded. During the Cold War only Federal Councillor Leon Schlumpf travelled to Ireland – but for a session of the European Conference of Transport Ministers in 1982 rather than a bilateral meeting.⁵⁴

Despite the lack of visits, an upgrading of the relationship between Ireland and Switzerland can be seen in the rank of the respective representatives. Initially, Benziger in 1939 and Cremins in 1940 received the rank of a Chargé d’affaires. Warnock, who succeeded Cremins in February 1950, was then appointed with the rank of Minister, surprising Switzerland, which did not react with reciprocity. This displeased the Irish and Minister Warnock raised it on several occasions. However, Julien Rossat, Head of Administrative Affairs in the FPD, questioned whether von Burg should be promoted. In fact, the FPD was in the midst of austerity measures and Rossat wanted to push 62-year-old von Burg into early retirement. In so doing, Rossat criticised von Burg for not attending the New Year’s reception at the Irish president’s house, which had come to the attention of a Swiss citizen in Dublin, who had then contacted the Department in Bern. The Irish DEA responded that von Burg’s absence had been correctly announced weeks in advance and that they would «not in slightest degree» resent the absence. On the contrary they would have urged von Burg not to cut short his holiday for the reception. The DEA went quite far in its defence of von Burg and instructed Warnock that he should «tell Rossat that if the Swiss Government’s choice of a Minister to Dublin should fall on M. de Bourg, we would be very happy indeed.»⁵⁵ Warnock was not only pushed further by the DEA, but also by the Head of Protocol in the Swiss Political Department, André Boissier, who was a close friend of von Burg. Boissier even told Warnock what arguments would be best used to convince Federal Councillor Petitpierre to promote von Burg. This put Warnock in an awkward position, and he feared becoming «a fellow conspirator of M. Boissier against M. Rossat!»⁵⁶ Warnock cautiously broached the subject in October 1950 in a conversation with Federal Councillor Petitpierre. The latter was also convinced of von Burg’s character and wanted to support his appointment as Minister. Warnock, however, feared objections from Rossat. In fact, a way out eventually presented itself with Rossat’s appointment as Swiss Envoy to Ankara in February 1951. Strikingly, the FPD submitted a request to the Federal Council to elevate von Burg to the post of Minister only a month after Rossat’s appointment. The Federal Council approved the request on 16 March 1951.⁵⁷

The respective representatives could now build relations with the authorities in their host country as Ministers. The Irish Ministers in Bern, Warnock,

51 Only pictures of these two meetings have been archived. No notes of the discussions have been filed on either the Irish or the Swiss side.

52 See the report by the Political Division I of the FPD, 3 September 1986, dodis.ch/63027.

53 This statement is also confirmed in Political Report No. 1 of the Swiss envoy in Dublin, Eric Kessler, 9 March 1956, CH-BAR#E2300#1000/716#283* (49).

54 Apparently, he also only stayed in Dublin for a few hours. See the final report from the Swiss Ambassador in Dublin, Charles Hummel, 27 April 1992, dodis.ch/61167.

55 See the letter from the Secretary of the DEA, Frederick H. Boland, to Minister Warnock, 22 March 1950, IE-NA#DFA/10/2/32.

56 See the letter from Minister Warnock to the DEA, 27 October 1950, IE-NA#DFA/10/2/32.

57 See the Minutes of the Federal Council No. 567, 16 March 1951, CH-BAR#E1004.1#1000/9#14600*.

and his successor, Hugh McCann, met regularly with Alfred Zehnder, the Secretary General of the FPD and thus the de facto number two in Swiss foreign policy. The talks mostly dealt with the behaviour of the great powers in the Cold War. A familiar atmosphere apparently prevailed and Zehnder did not shy away from presenting his personal assessment instead of just explaining Switzerland's official position. The personal relationship between Warnock and Zehnder may have played a role in this atmosphere. They knew each other well, having both been stationed in Berlin during the war. Zehnder, who was born in Moscow and spoke fluent Russian, was seen by the Irish representatives as a great expert on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Both Warnock and McCann informed headquarters in Dublin about these discussions in detail.⁵⁸ In Dublin, in the years after the war, there were no such confidential and regular exchanges between the Swiss representative and the DEA. It is quite plausible that Switzerland was less interested in Ireland's opinion on global policy issues. Switzerland, as a much older state than Ireland, had more experience in assessing global politics and was less interested in how another state handled it. Nevertheless, there were some individual political issues in which Switzerland was interested in Ireland's position, especially concerning its relationship with international organisations.

In the 1950s both countries were thus represented by Ministers. It should be emphasised here that this was the highest diplomatic rank that Switzerland recognised at the time. Switzerland was reluctant to appoint Ambassadors for a long time. Ireland, on the other hand, appointed its first Ambassador in 1946 to the Holy See and upgraded its Legations to Embassies from the 1950s onward. Thus, Ireland observed with interest that Switzerland finally decided in 1956 to be represented by Ambassadors.⁵⁹ McCann, who was by now the Irish representative in Bern, reported on 12 December 1955, «that the Federal Council have at last summoned up enough courage to do what thinking people recognised should have been done long ago, namely to have Switzerland represented abroad by Ambassadors in appropriate cases.»⁶⁰ However, the representation in Dublin was not yet affected. On the contrary, voices had recently even been raised in Swiss parliament about downgrading the Legation back to a consulate. Emil Klöti, a member of the Council of States and Social Democrat from Zurich, asked Federal Councillor Petitpierre in 1953 whether, in view of the modest political and economic relations between Switzerland and Ireland, it would not be appropriate to abolish the Legation in Ireland and appoint an Honorary Consul instead.⁶¹ This would have put Swiss representation even further behind the 1934 solution of a General Consulate. The Federal Council firmly rejected this demand, but it still took a few years before the two countries were represented by Ambassadors.

McCann's successor in Bern, Josephine Ahearne McNeill, also acted only as Minister, while almost all other countries had already replaced their Ministers in Bern with Ambassadors. She, therefore, pleaded for her appointment as Ambassador in a letter to the DEA in 1957.⁶² Nevertheless, the transformation did not take place until 1962, when the Irish government decided to appoint William Warnock as Ambassador to Bern. Switzerland, for its part, reacted in

⁵⁸ See numerous documents in IE-NA#DFA/5/313/5B.

⁵⁹ See Jonas Hirschi: *Der unsichtbare Dienst*, Bern 2021, dodis.ch/q18, p. 55 f.

⁶⁰ Letter from the Irish envoy in Bern, Hugh James McCann, to the Secretary of the DEA, Seán Murphy, 12 December 1955, IE-NA#DFA/6/422/68/7.

⁶¹ See the note from the Head of the Division of Administrative Services, Fritz Hegg, to Federal Councillor Petitpierre, 26 January 1953, dodis.ch/10408.

⁶² See the letter from the Irish envoy in Bern, Josephine Ahearne McNeill, 16 August 1957, IE-NA#DFA/6/422/68/7.

the spirit of reciprocity by promoting its Minister in Dublin to Ambassador.⁶³ Ironically, it was none other than Julien Rossat who was the Swiss Envoy in Dublin at the time, thus becoming Switzerland's first Ambassador to Ireland. Rossat, who had previously been the main opponent of von Burg's promotion from Chargé d'affaires to Minister, was now allowed to benefit personally from the latest elevation of the Swiss representation in Dublin.

From 1962 onwards, Ireland and Switzerland regulated their diplomatic relations through Embassies. This put an end to the discussions about the right type of representation, which had been ongoing since Griffiths wrote to the Federal Council in 1920 requesting that Switzerland open a consulate in Dublin. 31

The Problem-free Relations 1962–1989: Economic Relations Ireland's foreign policy changed deeply with its accession to the European Community (EC) in 1972, with Irish diplomats thereafter meeting Swiss authorities as EC representatives, but with no bilateral issues being discussed. Bilateral relations were not particularly deep from the 1960s to the 1980s and they did not bring many problems. 32

Ireland's great economic growth began in the 1990s. Prior to that, economic development, and consequently, foreign trade was at a low level. By far the most important trading partner during this period was the UK. In the 1960s, however, the Swiss watch industry did become active in Ireland. 33

In June 1964, with help of the Swiss Ambassador, a convention was signed between the Irish government and the Federation of Swiss Watch Manufacturers with the aim of opening an Irish Swiss Institute of Horology in Dublin. The idea of this institute was closely related to Ireland's economic situation, as Ambassador Rossat explained to headquarters. In Ireland, there would be a lack of training opportunities for highly qualified jobs and cooperation with the Swiss watch industry would be very welcome, also in preventing the emigration of young people.⁶⁴ One year later, on 21 June 1965, Rossat cut first sod for the Irish-Swiss Institute of Horology in Blanchardstown, Dublin, which existed until 2004. Shortly after the founding of the institute, however, rumours of «chablonnage» began to surface. In chablonnage, individual parts of watch movements are exported abroad and assembled there. Since no finished product is imported in this way, higher customs duties can be avoided. Ambassador Rossat submitted a memorandum on this issue to the Secretary General in the Irish Department of Finance in February 1966, however he did not want to pursue these unsubstantiated accusations by the Federation of Swiss Watch Manufacturers any further.⁶⁵ 34

A larger issue was the conclusion of a double taxation agreement between Ireland and Switzerland. As late as October 1964, neither the Swiss tax administration, the Embassy in Dublin, nor the Bankers Association gave any priority to such an agreement because the extent of mutual investment was so low. However, the OECD recommended that its member states conclude double taxation agreements among themselves, which is why corresponding preliminary explorations were started in March 1965 in Dublin.⁶⁶ Official negotiations began in October 1965 in Bern and St. Gallen and by April of the following year, a draft agreement was presented, which was approved by the Federal 35

⁶³ See the Minutes of the Federal Council No. 217, 30 January 1962, CH-BAR#E1004.1#1000/9#15562*.

⁶⁴ See Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland (DDS), vol. 23, doc. 21, dodis.ch/31577.

⁶⁵ See the letter from the Swiss Embassy in Dublin to the Commerce Division, 29 July 1965, dodis.ch/31584.

⁶⁶ See the minutes of a discussion between the Federal Administration and representatives of the cantons and business associations, 7 April 1965, dodis.ch/31446.

Council and signed in November 1966. After being passed by parliament, the agreement entered into force on 16 February 1968. In fact, after the conclusion of the double taxation agreement, between 1967 and 1971, imports and exports between Switzerland and Ireland increased massively: from 17 million CHF each to over 40 million CHF. Nevertheless, the first general bilateral economic talks of an informal nature at senior official level did not take place until January 1982 in Dublin.⁶⁷

In January 1982, a four-member Swiss delegation travelled to Dublin⁶⁸ and met representatives from the Ministries of Trade, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Energy and Agriculture. While the focus was on the EC, with Switzerland wanting to emphasise its importance in trade with the EC, bilateral issues like promoting Swiss investments in Ireland were also discussed. The delegation also met Swiss companies in Ireland that saw great potential for growth in the Irish market.⁶⁹ The talks served as an exchange of information as well as an opportunity to explain the respective economic strategies. Compared to previous official visits, no agreement was at the centre of the talks. Nevertheless, a benefit was apparently attributed to this exchange, because the following year, in October 1983, a reciprocal visit by an Irish delegation took place in Bern.

Like the Swiss the year before, the Irish sent a delegation of four.⁷⁰ The main concern for the Irish was convincing Switzerland of their solvency and, once again, to appeal for Swiss investment. Relations between the EC and EFTA were then discussed. Switzerland pleaded for a jumbo meeting between the EC and EFTA in the second half of the following year, in which, coincidentally, Ireland would hold the EC presidency and Switzerland the EFTA presidency. The Irish side was less convinced about the need for such a meeting.⁷¹

Nevertheless, in October 1984, a Swiss delegation again travelled to Dublin for the third economic relations meeting in three years.⁷² The focus was again on EC-EFTA relations. Ireland was sympathetic to the Swiss position, which sought to further promote free trade between the EC and EFTA. Unlike the talks of the two previous years, there was no time at all given to bilateral issues.⁷³

The last economic discussion in this framework during the Cold War period took place in 1987.⁷⁴ Once again, free trade and European integration were at the centre of the talks; bilateral issues were only briefly touched upon.⁷⁵ The reason for this was the still modest exchange of goods. As the Federal Office for Foreign Trade noted in preparation for the meeting of 1987, only 0.2% of Swiss exports and 0.5% of imports involved Ireland.⁷⁶

⁶⁷ See the compilation dodis.ch/C2565.

⁶⁸ The Swiss delegation was led by Ambassador Cornelio Sommaruga, the Federal Council's delegate for trade agreements.

⁶⁹ See the report from the Division of Commerce of the FDEA, 8 February 1982, dodis.ch/63039.

⁷⁰ The Irish delegation was led by the Deputy Secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), Seán Gaynor.

⁷¹ See for the note from the Swiss side, dodis.ch/67074, and for the note from the Irish side, dodis.ch/67075. The first joint ministerial meeting of the EC and EFTA, the Jumbo Meeting, actually took place in Luxembourg in April 1984. However, by falling in the first half of the year it did not go along with the presidencies of Ireland and Switzerland.

⁷² However, the composition of the discussion delegations was different after some personnel changes. The Swiss delegation was headed by Sommaruga's successor Ambassador Philippe Lévy and they met the delegation of the DFA led by Ambassador Eamon Ó Tuathail.

⁷³ See the note from the Swiss Integration Bureau, 19 October 1984, dodis.ch/67077.

⁷⁴ The deputy state secretaries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, John Swift and Ted O'Reilly, travelled to Bern in November and met with State Secretary Franz Blankart and Ambassador Lévy.

⁷⁵ See the report from the Division of Commerce, 20 November 1987, dodis.ch/65332.

⁷⁶ See the note from the Division of Commerce, 4 November 1987, dodis.ch/67078.

In 1988, the new Swiss Ambassador to Dublin, Charles Hummel, started an economic initiative by launching the idea of a Swiss-Irish Business Association. Hummel's idea was to replace the unattractive existing Swiss Business Lunch with an organisation that would not only provide a networking platform, but organise lectures and discussion panels as well. Together with representatives of ASEA/BBC, Nestlé, Swissair and the Swiss Bank Corporation, Hummel pursued the idea further and SIBA was founded on 25 October 1988. The founding meeting was attended by Séamus Brennan, the Irish Minister of Trade, who emphasised the economic perception of Ireland in Switzerland in his speech: «With Ireland Switzerland has a friend and ally in the EC.»⁷⁷ 40

It was indeed Ireland's presidency of the EC in 1990 which led to the next period of Swiss interest in visits to Ireland. In 1989, two high-ranking representatives of the Federal Office for Foreign Trade travelled to Dublin: Silvio Arioli, Delegate of the Federal Council for Trade Agreements, and the State Secretary of the FDEA, Franz Blankart. Both of them also addressed the newly formed SIBA, whose foundation by Ambassador Hummels was praised in the reports. Both Arioli and Blankart noted the Irish friendliness and the great Irish interest in Swiss concerns. However, their respective interpretations of the mood were different. Blankart stressed that he was welcomed warmly by reliable colleagues. This would have been due to the coinciding interests of small nations that fear the supremacy of their neighbours.⁷⁸ Although Arioli also believed that Ireland, as a small country of little importance, appreciated his visit and had prepared well, he questioned the support from the Irish side: «It is difficult to determine whether the lack of any objection is due to politeness, lack of knowledge or genuine agreement.»⁷⁹ 41

It was not only the Swiss Department of Economic Affairs that was interested in the Irish EC presidency though. In January 1990, the State Secretary in the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), Klaus Jacobi, paid a visit to Dublin. This visit, however, should be seen in the context of Switzerland's traditional visits to the country holding the EC presidency. Therefore, European issues were again the main topics addressed and Jacobi, like Arioli and Blankart the year before, tried to sensitise his Irish interlocutors to Swiss concerns regarding the EC. In the bilateral field, the two parties only noted the absence of problems.⁸⁰ 42

Nevertheless, the Head of Political Division I of the FDFA, Ambassador Jenö Staehelin, criticised the fact that Switzerland, along with Iceland, was the only EFTA country that did not send the head of government or a member of the government to the EC presidency of Ireland. He noted the pronounced deficit of a visit at ministerial level. Staehelin suggested on behalf of Political Division I that contacts with Ireland should be intensified.⁸¹ 43

Military Relations and the Bachmann Affair

Military relations between the two neutral states were no more intense than the superficial political or economic relations between Ireland and Switzerland. There were a few reciprocal exchange visits to learn about the respective army's organisation, but these were limited in number. This can certainly be explained by Ireland's proportionally small army, but also by the very different topographical and geographical conditions for the defence of the two states. 44

⁷⁷ See the telex No. 45 from the Swiss Embassy in Dublin, 27 October 1988, dodis.ch/67079.

⁷⁸ See the report from the Swiss side, dodis.ch/63076, and from the Irish side, dodis.ch/67080.

⁷⁹ See the report of the Swiss Delegate for trade agreements, Silvio Arioli, 29 May 1989, dodis.ch/60008.

⁸⁰ See the Weekly Telex 4/90 of the FDFA, 22 January 1990, dodis.ch/55105.

⁸¹ See the note from the Head of the Political Division I of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), Ambassador Jenö Staehelin, to the Head of the FDFA, Federal Councillor René Felber, 27 February 1990, dodis.ch/56138.

After an initial visit in 1923 failed to materialise despite preparatory work, the first visit probably took place in October 1955 when an Irish military delegation⁸² visited Switzerland at the invitation of the Federal Council to observe the training and manoeuvres of the Swiss Army. The Irish side took care to appoint representatives to the delegation who were highly trained and who would also speak French so that «their knowledge of military matters and languages would add to the prestige of the Defence forces».⁸³ The next Irish visit took place in September 1962 when the Chief of Staff and two other officers visited the Swiss Army again to attend training sessions and manoeuvres. As in 1955, the initiative came from the Swiss Authorities.⁸⁴ 45

A third visit was made to Alpnach in 1990 by Irish Air Corps pilots. This was followed by a reciprocal visit by the Swiss Air Force to Ireland in 1992. In the process, there were surprising findings about the form of Swiss neutrality, as can be seen in the Irish report of 14 February 1991. The Irish delegation was kitted out with complete Swiss Air Force flying gear, because «of Swiss neutrality they do not want visiting aircrew to be recognised as foreign. This is so they cannot be accused of being aligned with any world power.»⁸⁵ 46

It can therefore be stated that there were not many visits between Ireland and Switzerland in the military sphere either. The main interest of the Swiss army was certainly in the purchase of remounts in Ireland. However, there was also a somewhat bizarre episode in security policy relations between Ireland and Switzerland, which had the potential to also affect political relations between the two states. 47

Since the 1960s, there had been a special service section in the Swiss military, which was tasked with preparing the resistance in the case of an occupation. In 1976, a certain Colonel Albert Bachmann was appointed head of this special service section. He was a great admirer of Ireland and had owned land in West Cork since 1963 in order to build a holiday home there. This fortunate circumstance led the Swiss resistance organisation to choose West Cork as the location for the Swiss government-in-exile in the event of a Soviet occupation. Ireland's neutrality also played an important role in these considerations. Then in 1976, Bachmann started «Operation Edelweiss» to build a holiday resort near his holiday home, next to the small town of Skibbereen. This resort was financed through the Union Bank of Switzerland.⁸⁶ Bachmann, with his hard anti-communist stance, had good contacts among the bourgeois upper class in Switzerland and also with the banks. One part of the resort was a restaurant, which was much too large and had far too many storerooms for tourist purposes and thus showed its true purpose as the secret seat of the Swiss government during an occupation. Another part of the resort was made up of small fishermen's houses with converted cellars, where gold from the Swiss National Bank was to be stored. In 1978, Bachmann also bought the Lis Ard Estate there and opened a hotel. By 1979 the work of Operation Edelweiss was well advanced: the National Bank had apparently already agreed to move gold out to Skibbereen, the Swiss Confederation paid the rent of the hotel and the use of the holiday homes 48

82 The delegation was composed of Lieutenant-Colonels Patrick Curran, Justin McCarthy and Commandant Terence O'Brien.

83 See the letter from Chief of Staff Patrick Mulcahy, 28 April 1955, IE-MA#DOD-3-23123.

84 See numerous documents in IE-MA#DOD-3-40494.

85 See numerous documents in IE-MA#ACHQ-3627-008.

86 As late as 1980, the Federal Council ruled out the possibility that the Union Bank of Switzerland had participated financially in the operation. However, the director of Union Bank of Switzerland, Robert Sutz, stated in an article in *Schweizer Illustrierte* on 3 December 1979 that he was good friends with Albert Bachmann and that he had arranged «financially strong partners» for him. See *Der Bund*, 25 June 1980, p. 15 and *Schweizer Illustrierte*, 3 December 1979, p. 24



The director of the Union Bank of Switzerland, Robert Sutz, with Albert Bachmann in West Cork in 1979 or earlier, dodis.ch/68739.

and a powerful radio system had even been installed already.⁸⁷ Then came the Schilling affair in November 1979,⁸⁸ during the course of which Bachmann's identity was revealed, leading to a parliamentary investigation and a public report in January 1981.⁸⁹ Bachmann had to retire immediately, but the case was now known to the Irish press, which was happy to report on it. The headlines read «Irish haven for Swiss leaders unearthed» and «Swiss super-spy's plan to move Berne to Skibbereen».⁹⁰ The affair also became a topic in the Irish parliament. The Fine Gael Teachta Dála, Richie Ryan, asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs whether he had already exchanged views with the Swiss authorities on the plans for Swiss exile in Ireland. He replied placatingly on 5 February 1981 that it was a private investment and that the Swiss government had not made any decision on the location of the exile government. Minister Brian Lenihan thus adhered to his Political Division's recommendation for everyone «to laugh off the incident», since the Swiss were bound to be fairly embarrassed about the matter already.⁹¹

In this manner, the Irish side contributed to the de-escalation of an affair, which could well have caused a storm had the reaction been different. It, therefore, remains a somewhat absurd episode in Swiss-Irish relations. After leaving the intelligence service, Colonel Bachmann retired to Ireland, where he died in Cork on 12 April 2011.

The Perception of the Neutrality

Neutrality has been a foreign policy tool for Ireland and Switzerland at least since they became independent states. For Switzerland, the idea of internation-

⁸⁷ See Ruedi Moser: *Schweizer Geheimarmee*, Sumiswald 1993, pp. 125–131.

⁸⁸ Swiss citizen Kurt Schilling – on behalf of Bachmann – spied in Austria on army manoeuvres there. Schilling was so clumsy that he was discovered and arrested.

⁸⁹ See dodis.ch/57845. The report has also been archived by various Irish bodies.

⁹⁰ See *Irish Times*, 29. January 1980, and *Irish Press*, 30. January 1980, IE-NA#2015/51/127.

⁹¹ See the letter from R. H. O'Toole from the Political Division of the DFA to the Diplomatic Adviser in the DFA, Michael Lillis, 3 February 1981, dodis.ch/67081.

ally recognised or even imposed neutrality dates back to the Congress of Vienna. With the Hague Conventions of 1907 and the recognition of Swiss neutrality at the League of Nations, this permanent neutrality was further cemented. Ireland, however, does not have such a long history of neutrality, having not long had its own state system. Nevertheless, in the early discussions on state formation between 1913 and 1916, there were already demands that the future state would have to be neutral.⁹² This idea of neutrality though was mostly due to anti-British sentiment. The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 then made a credible neutrality policy more difficult due to the close ties with the United Kingdom. Yet, while the idea of neutrality remained on the Irish political agenda, it was not until the Anglo-Irish Trade Agreement of 1938 and the detachment of Irish ports from the British Army that a real policy of neutrality was possible. When de Valera proclaimed Irish neutrality though, he was well aware that he was not aiming for a traditional neutrality like that of Switzerland.⁹³ Irish neutrality meant first and foremost that the country did not want to be drawn into wars in which Britain became involved. Irish neutrality was thus an instrument of separation from the United Kingdom. However, the Irish, and de Valera, in particular, understood that their neutrality included «a certain consideration for Britain»⁹⁴ during the war. As Patrick Keatinge described in his significant analysis of Irish neutrality, *A Singular Stance*, the range of activities which illustrated this consideration of Britain included the exchange of information on coast-watching and weather forecasting, high-level secret talks and joint military manoeuvres north and south of the Irish border. This limited neutrality was also evident in reactions after the war as Keatinge points out: «After the war the Pentagon even contemplated decorating Irish military leaders for their wartime services!»⁹⁵

Switzerland also held talks with the war powers and came to arrangements, but the respective interpretations of neutrality by Ireland and Switzerland were indeed different during the Second World War. Another major difference was the degree of defence credibility of the respective neutralities. While Switzerland maintained a proportionally high defence budget even after the war, Keatinge described Ireland at the beginning of the War «in conventional military terms [...] virtually defenceless.»⁹⁶ Even though it is questionable how long Switzerland could have militarily defended its neutrality in the event of an attack during the Second World War, a dividing line between the two concepts of neutrality was repeatedly drawn here. The Swiss envoy in Dublin described it in 1955: «The Irish like to talk about our neutrality; but not about its military component. The praise, for example, that President Eisenhower gave us the other day was only printed in one newspaper here; the others ignored it altogether.»⁹⁷

However, after the war, both Irish and Swiss neutrality and the corresponding lack of military support in the fight against the Nazis were heavily criticised by the Allies. Both states stood by their foreign policy principles, though to varying degrees. Irish neutrality saw its most drastic development under Taoiseach Séan Lemass from 1959 onwards. With a view to apply for membership of the European Economic Community (EEC), Lemass distanced himself from the previous Irish neutrality in speeches at an early stage. This was also

⁹² Patrick Keatinge: *A Singular Stance*, Dublin 1984, p. 11.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 13–16.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 17. See also Ronan Fanning: «Irish Neutrality – An Historical Review», in: *Irish Studies in International Affairs* vol. 1, No. 3, 1982, pp. 27–38.

⁹⁶ Patrick Keatinge: *A Singular Stance*, p. 19.

⁹⁷ Letter from the Swiss envoy in Dublin, Eric Kessler, 24 May 1955, dodis.ch/67083.

observed by Swiss Envoy Rossat, who heard Lemass speak at a conference on the morality of neutrality in 1960, where the Prime Minister stated that there would be no doubt on which side of the conflict between the West and the East Ireland would stand.⁹⁸ Even if neutrality in the narrower sense merely means staying out of military conflicts and does not have to result in ideological neutrality, this can certainly be seen as a step towards softening the Irish discourse on neutrality. When in 1962 Sweden, Austria and Switzerland launched an enquiry as to whether EEC accession was possible under the conditions of neutrality, Ireland did not join in.

For Switzerland, however, 1962 was also the year when its neutrality was once again given an international boost. The Cuban Missile Crisis, in which Switzerland played an important role as a representative of the USA's interests in Cuba, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross, which had its seat in Geneva, led to a reassessment of the neutral states, as the Irish Ambassador in Bern noted with satisfaction. He hoped that this proof of the benefits of Swiss neutrality would also improve the status of Ireland's neutrality in showing «to certain gentlemen in Brussels and in the United States» that neutrality was not an anachronism in the second half of the 20th century.⁹⁹

1962 can thus be regarded as a key year in which Irish and Swiss neutrality drifted further apart. This required explanation and the different conceptions of neutrality were explained in detail by the Irish Foreign Minister Frank Aiken in conversation with the Swiss envoy, Julien Rossat, at a dinner at the Swiss Legation in 1962, where he displayed impressive knowledge of Swiss history. He described various events in the history of Switzerland in order to explain to Rossat that Ireland has not had the same experience. Ireland was forced to practice a policy of neutrality. Nevertheless, with European integration in the face of the potential communist expansion, Aiken feared «that we shall end up giving up neutrality altogether.»¹⁰⁰

Thus, it was not only the Swiss assessment but also the Irish self-perception that gave Irish neutrality a lesser quality than Swiss neutrality. In 1969, Irish Ambassador Biggar described in a conversation with Jürg Iselin, Head of the Swiss Integration Bureau, that Ireland would not be neutral «as a matter of principle but simply did not happen to be a member of any military alliance.»¹⁰¹

It was Ireland's accession to the EEC that was to be the next major influence on the Swiss perception of Irish neutrality, as Switzerland did not see such membership as compatible with neutrality. For the Irish, who joined the EEC under economic pressure, neutrality hardly played any role in negotiations at the time. The Irish regarded the EEC as a purely economic body. Since EEC membership reduced the economic dependence on the United Kingdom, there was even expected to be a positive effect on the neutrality policy.¹⁰²

The biggest change in Swiss neutrality, according to the Irish Embassy, was Switzerland's willingness to cooperate with other neutrals. While Federal Councillor Petitpierre issued the slogan that Switzerland was so neutral that it

⁹⁸ See the letter from the Swiss envoy in Dublin, Julien Rossat, to the FPD, 7 December 1960, CH-BAR#E2200.27-02#1983/79#32* (G.60).

⁹⁹ Political Report of the Irish Embassy in Bern, 8 November 1962, dodis.ch/67085.

¹⁰⁰ Political Report 1/62 of the Swiss Legation in Dublin, 8 February 1962, dodis.ch/67086.

¹⁰¹ Political Report 1/69 of the Irish Embassy in Bern, 23 January 1969, dodis.ch/67087.

¹⁰² It is also interesting to note the changes that the Irish Ambassadors observed in Swiss neutrality. Even individual visits by the foreign Ministers were interpreted as small changes in Switzerland's neutral policy. The Irish Ambassador in Bern, Francis Biggar, noted in 1969: «Nevertheless, in the best Swiss tradition, any evolution will certainly be extremely cautious and, like the elephant on uncertain terrain, the Swiss are highly unlikely to move more than a foot at a time and then only after testing the ground thoroughly.» Political Report 11/69 of the Irish Embassy in Bern, 7 May 1969, IE-NA#2000/14/467.

would not even join a league of neutrals, the Irish observed, for example, regular meetings between Austria and Switzerland from 1974 onwards, at which questions of neutrality were also discussed.¹⁰³ Ireland had accepted its role as a not entirely neutral state and never demanded its inclusion in Switzerland's consultations with other neutrals.¹⁰⁴ Ireland was subsequently not included in the circle of the «Four Neutrals», the exchange forum between Sweden, Finland, Austria and Switzerland.

Neutrality as a subject of negotiation with the British is also clearly admitted by the Irish side. For example, in a conversation between a «senior official in the Irish Foreign Office» and Swiss Ambassador Hans Miesch in 1982, the former outlined that Ireland would not want to become a permanently neutral state but used its neutrality to keep its options open for a solution in the unification question.¹⁰⁵

At the end of the 1980s, when Switzerland was discussing its own European integration, Swiss officials again took a strong interest in Irish neutrality. Ambassador Charles Hummel prepared a report on Irish neutrality in March 1988. He introduced the report with the following words: «Irish neutrality is shimmering, vague, ambiguous. A large majority of the population (over 80%) supports it, but one in three Irish people has no clear idea of what neutrality actually means.»¹⁰⁶ Hummel then discredited Irish neutrality on several grounds. He noted that neutrality did not appear anywhere in the Irish constitution and he was bothered by the fact that in Ireland the term «military neutrality» was always used.¹⁰⁷ Hummel went on to describe Ireland as having an unarmed neutrality, that Ireland was involved in the CSCE in the EC group and not in the Neutral + Non Aligned Group and that Ireland participated actively in UN peacekeeping operations. The latter point, in particular, was assessed completely differently by Switzerland four years later and shows how the assessment of neutrality could change greatly within a few years.¹⁰⁸ An anecdote that Hummel included in the report could also apply just as well to Switzerland as to Ireland:

The same attitude is illustrated by a neat anecdote told to me by a chief official of the Department of Trade and Industry to make me understand Irish neutrality: Two Irishmen go to a rugby match. One asks: «Are you for Galway or for Cork?» Answer, «I'm neutral». «Yes I know,» says the first, «but neutral for whom?» – «That's the way it is with Ireland. Ireland is neutral – for the West», added the chief official, explaining.¹⁰⁹

Hummel's report, which strongly relativises Irish neutrality, no longer seems valid, especially from a contemporary perspective, without also relativising Swiss neutrality to a similar extent. It was the statement by Irish Secretary of State Noel Dorr that Irish neutrality was a practice and not a principle that seemed to astonish Hummel, but it would be a fine description of Swiss neutrality today.

¹⁰³ See Political Report 4/74 of the Irish Embassy in Bern, 28 May 1974, IE-NA#2009/102/2.

¹⁰⁴ This idea of an exchange on neutrality with Ireland came from the Swiss side, namely from the newly elected and unexperienced Foreign Minister Pierre Aubert in his conversation with the Irish Ambassador in Bern, Brendan Nolan, in 1978. Political Report 12/78 of the Irish Embassy in Bern, 13 October 1978, dodis.ch/67088.

¹⁰⁵ Political Report 5/82 of the Swiss Embassy in Dublin, 2 June 1982, CH-BAR#E2010-02A#1994/374#32* (A.21.31).

¹⁰⁶ See the note from Ambassador Hummel, 23 March 1988, dodis.ch/67076.

¹⁰⁷ However, as already mentioned – legally speaking – there is no neutrality other than military neutrality. In this respect, the Swiss discourse with its various forms of neutrality is atypical to this day.

¹⁰⁸ For the compatibility of neutrality with participation in UN blue helmet forces, see the compilation dodis.ch/C2509.

¹⁰⁹ See dodis.ch/67076.

When Ambassador Staehelin, travelled to Dublin in April 1988, he too formulated a report on Irish neutrality. He observed a high value placed on neutrality in Ireland. For example, during the negotiation of the Single European Act in 1986, Ireland had argued that European discussions would be limited to the economic and political aspects of security and exclude the military sphere. When ratifying the SEA, the Irish government made a statement that the Act would not affect Ireland's long-established policy of military-neutrality. Staehelin also stated that Ireland would vote with the neutrals Sweden, Finland, and Austria rather than with France and the UK at the UN. Staehelin learned that Ireland was opposed to neutrality reservations in the EC if other neutral small states joined the community, if only because this would mean that Ireland itself had badly bargained for its own neutrality when entering the EC.¹¹⁰ It is remarkable how within a few weeks two very different reports on Irish neutrality were written by Swiss diplomats.

As a side note, Switzerland today considers Ireland to be a neutral partner, whether in the context of peacebuilding or Switzerland's candidacy for the UN Security Council.¹¹¹ During the research period, on the other hand, the differences in the two conceptions of neutrality were emphasised, and can be summarised as follows:

1. Swiss neutrality was better secured and recognised under international law, partly because it was explicitly decreed by the other states at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, at the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and by Switzerland's admission to the League of Nations, where Switzerland, unlike Ireland, was able to assert a reservation of neutrality.
2. Swiss neutrality was better armed than Irish neutrality. This argument was regularly used by contemporaries, as the Irish defence was massively less well financed than the Swiss defence during the Second World War as well as during the Cold War.
3. Irish neutrality did not have the permanent character of Swiss neutrality, partly because of the respective ages of the two states, but also because Ireland always regarded neutrality as a tool of negotiation – especially in the discussions with Great Britain on the partition of Ireland. Switzerland has at times referred to Irish neutrality as «ad hoc neutrality».

The Irelandisation of the Jura Question 1968–1978

The civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, the question of the partition of Ireland and the resulting violent clashes were a primary focus of the Swiss Embassy in political reports. The Civil Rights March in Derry on 5 October 1968, which is cited by many as the starting point of «The Troubles», found its way into Political Report 6/68 by Ambassador Guy von Keller, who wrote an article sympathetic to the catholic Civil Rights movement. The Christian charity of the Protestant Reverend Ian Paisley was characterised by irreconcilable hatred of the Catholics according to von Keller. He described the government's discriminatory policy as «apartheid», that the minority's grievances were justified and he hoped that the «discerning elements in Northern Ireland will summon the courage to engage in constructive dialogue with the minority without delay, before it is too late for reasonable and

¹¹⁰ See the note from Ambassador Staehelin, 19 July 1988, [dodis.ch/67089](https://www.dodis.ch/67089).

¹¹¹ See the postulate by National Councillor Fabian Molina of 16 June 2022. He wrote: «With the accession of Finland and Sweden to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Austria, Ireland, Moldova, Malta, Cyprus and formally Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia remain in the group of neutral states in Europe», www.parlament.ch. And the FDFA brochure «Swiss Neutrality» of March 2022 states: «Other neutral or non-aligned states such as Austria, Sweden, Finland and Ireland have repeatedly served on the Security Council.» See [dodis.ch/67100](https://www.dodis.ch/67100).

peaceful talks for which the minority political leadership is reaching out.»¹¹² On the other side, the Irish Embassy in Bern examined how the situation in Northern Ireland was reported in the Swiss press and on television, finding that the reporting was generally in favour of the nationalists and of the Republic of Ireland. The Irish Ambassador in Bern, Francis Biggar, reported on 27 January 1969 that French-speaking television in Switzerland had shown a programme about the «religious war» in Northern Ireland, which was apparently also watched by Swiss authorities and the diplomatic corps in Bern, and expressed views «which were decidedly sympathetic to the Nationalists».¹¹³

The crisis caused by the Battle of the Bogside in Derry in August 1969 was also described by Ambassador von Keller in several political reports. He described the Northern Ireland government's toleration of the Protestant Apprentices March of 12 August as «irresponsible».¹¹⁴ Von Keller hoped as early as 14 August 1969 that the affairs of state would be taken over by London, which then became reality with the Northern Ireland Act of 1972. Von Keller also saw Swiss participation in a UN operation in Northern Ireland, should it come to that, as appropriate and cited the UN mission in Jerusalem, which was led by a Swiss for comparison.¹¹⁵ However, when in August 1969 Ambassador Biggar gave a letter to the Secretary General of the FPD, Ambassador Pierre Micheli, requesting support from the Federal Council, Micheli indicated that the Federal Council was unlikely to deviate from its traditional line. Biggar realised that a public announcement could not be expected because of Switzerland's policy of neutrality, but he asked the Federal Council to use its influence for a peaceful solution.¹¹⁶ In the end, the Federal Council took no position in the conflict.¹¹⁷

The Irish request that Switzerland contribute to the peaceful resolution of the conflict was renewed 6 years later in a rare meeting between the Swiss and Irish Foreign Ministers. As already explained, no such bilateral visits took place at ministerial level, but Federal Councillor Pierre Graber met Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave as well as Foreign Minister Garret Fitzgerald at the CSCE Summit in Helsinki from 30 July to 1 August 1975. The informal meeting took place at the suggestion of the Irish as they wanted to give their point of view on the problems of Northern Ireland. The Political Directorate in the FPD noted, that «the Prime Minister expressed the hope that Switzerland would also use all of its influence to resolve this problem.» Apparently, Federal Councillor Graber took note of these statements, without elaborating on them.¹¹⁸

Switzerland thus tried to stay out of the conflict in Northern Ireland as much as possible and did not respond to Irish calls either. However, Switzerland was not immune to the increase in terrorist violence during the late 1970s: The IRA apparently had accounts in Swiss banks. Irish priest Patrick Ryan, who as European Quartermaster of the IRA was responsible for these banking arrangements, travelled to Geneva several times in order to observe these arrangements. The money in the Swiss accounts was provided by, among others, Libyan leader Gaddafi. Ryan also apparently acquired memo parks in Switzerland that were used to build bombs. The Swiss memo parks were discovered in 185 different explosions in Northern Ireland. At the urging of Scotland Yard, Ryan was arrested in Switzerland on 26 July 1976 for suspected violation of the

¹¹² Political Report 6/68 of the Swiss Embassy in Dublin, 15 October 1968, dodis.ch/50667.

¹¹³ Political Report 2/69 of the Irish Embassy in Bern, 27 January 1969, IE-NA#2000/14/467.

¹¹⁴ Political Report 7/69 of the Swiss Embassy in Dublin, 14 August 1969, dodis.ch/67101.

¹¹⁵ Swiss diplomat, Ambassador Ernesto Thalmann, as Deputy Secretary-General of the UN, see Political Report 9/69, 28 August 1969, CH-BAR#E2300-01#1977/28#26* (A.21.31).

¹¹⁶ See the note from the FPD, 19 August 1969, dodis.ch/32422.

¹¹⁷ See the letter from the Head of the FPD, Federal Councillor Willy Spühler, to the Irish Ambassador in Bern, Frank Biggar, 1 September 1969, dodis.ch/32544.

¹¹⁸ See DDS, vol. 26, doc. 160, dodis.ch/38322.

War Material Export Act. During the interrogations, Ryan bluntly threatened violence against the Swiss Embassies in Dublin and London, which prompted the Embassy in London, in consultation with Scotland Yard, to take security precautions and a 10-point catalogue of measures.¹¹⁹ Due to a lack of evidence of a crime on Swiss soil, Ryan could not be extradited to the UK, but on 5 August 1976, the Attorney General of the Confederation banned Ryan from entering Switzerland and Liechtenstein.¹²⁰ At the same time, an investigation was apparently launched into whether the IRA was storing funds in Swiss banks.¹²¹ However, Ryan managed to get the funds out of Switzerland before the police could freeze them. This probably put an end to the storage of funds for the IRA in Switzerland.

While Switzerland tried not to get involved in the Northern Ireland conflict, there is another interesting connection, albeit at a purely discursive level. On 29 May 1975, Ambassador Warnock even titled his political report «Irlandisation du Jura» after a quote from a Swiss television report in the Jura and he wrote that the number of acts of violence, intimidation and boycott on a scale previously unknown in Switzerland, and the «Catholic-Protestant» controversy reminds one of the situation in the north of Ireland.¹²²

The notion of the «Irlandisation» of the Jura Question was also used three years later by Ambassador Nolan, although it remains unclear whether he is directly quoting Warnock's report here.¹²³ Of course, it is difficult to compare the Northern Ireland conflict with the Jura question. While the Northern Ireland conflict focused on civil rights issues, the Jura question was about whether the French-speaking Catholic minority in the canton of Bern should have their own canton. Nevertheless, both cases were about how to deal with a confessional minority and what authority could be given to it. Even though the Jura separatists carried out arson attacks, the extent of the violence cannot be compared to the Northern Ireland conflict, in which more than 3500 people lost their lives. Yet, it was the emerging and, for Switzerland unusual, propensity for violence on the part of a political grouping that led to these comparisons by the Irish Ambassadors in Bern.

Conclusion The history of Swiss-Irish relations developed along the lines of Irish history, especially in the early days. The defining events of the young state also shaped its foreign policy perception, including in Switzerland.

At an early stage, Ireland relied on diplomacy and foreign policy to establish itself internationally as an independent state. The first attempts at contact with the Swiss authorities took place even before the formation of its own state structures. In the course of clandestine diplomacy, Swiss representatives in Washington and Paris were contacted by unofficial Irish diplomats. Switzerland played an important role in Ireland's foreign policy. Due to its strategic location, targeted propaganda activities were carried out in Switzerland. These first years from 1918 to 1921 are therefore marked by a proactive Irish foreign policy towards Switzerland. Switzerland reacted in a strictly defensive manner. Switzerland did not even acknowledge the receipt of Irish letters, let alone answer them. The decisive turning point came with the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 6 December 1921. The notification of the Treaty by the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, allowed the Swiss authorities to respond to the Irish Free State's requests. Nevertheless, the Federal Council has never officially re-

¹¹⁹ See the note from the Swiss Embassy in London, 31 July 1976, dodis.ch/51167.

¹²⁰ See the Minutes of the Federal Council No. 814, 17 Mai 1978, dodis.ch/49780.

¹²¹ Political Report No. 44 of the Swiss Embassy in London, 7 October 1976, dodis.ch/51048.

¹²² Political Report 3/75 of the Irish Embassy in Bern, 29 May 1975, dodis.ch/67102.

¹²³ See Report 10/78, 26 September 1978, dodis.ch/67103.

cognised Ireland as an independent state. Moreover, no diplomatic representations were yet opened. The first representations – the Irish representation to the League of Nations in Geneva from 1921 and the Swiss Consul General in Dublin from 1934 – did, however, take on diplomatic tasks and had contacts with the governments in their respective host countries. Even if economic relations were not necessarily strengthened as a result, Switzerland decided to elevate the Consulate General to the status of Diplomatic Legation in 1939, and Ireland followed suit in 1940 with the opening of a Legation in Bern to replace the representation in Geneva. The establishment of normal diplomatic relations had to wait, however, due to the war. During the war, the envoys were mainly employed to report on the handling of the war in the host country and they particularly analysed the interpretation of the respective neutralities. After the war, the first visits by officials could take place and the first agreements were concluded.

In the first decades of the Cold War, however, diplomatic relations were characterised above all by the absence of ministerial meetings and negotiations. In the contacts between the envoys and the foreign ministries of the host country, global political issues were discussed rather than bilateral issues. The transformation of the Embassies into Legations in 1962 did not change this. It was not until Ireland joined the European Economic Community and took over the presidency of the European Community in 1984 and 1990 that Switzerland became more interested in Ireland. However, a regular exchange on political issues, like Switzerland had established with the other neutrals Austria, Finland and Sweden, was not established with Ireland. This was probably also due to the fact that Switzerland had never accepted Irish neutrality as an equal during the research period. Compared to Swiss neutrality, Irish neutrality was not permanent, i.e. it was negotiable, less internationally recognised and too lightly armed. The Irish did not contradict this assessment.

Bilateral relations between Ireland and Switzerland were, thus, not particularly intensive throughout the research period, were not affected by any major problems and were characterised at most by an astonishing absence of visits. Due to various comparable features in the state structure of Ireland and Switzerland, one might have expected greater interest in the other state, which was also expected by the respective Ambassadors. Yet, precisely because the bilateral relations remained rather superficial, they paint a presumably authentic picture of the two countries' respective foreign policies.