

**Victoria Pechyborshch, Post-Graduate student of the Chair of Diplomatic and Consular Service**

*Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine*

## **HUMANITARIAN POLICY OF THE SWISS CONFEDERATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS OF VERSAILLES-WASHINGTON SYSTEM**

The article provides an analysis of the content of the Swiss Confederation's refugee policy in times of crisis of Versailles-Washington system of international relations, which was a precondition for the country's specific measures in the humanitarian sphere during the Second World War. The author describes the basics of humanitarian policy of Switzerland in the first half of the twentieth century and calls reasons for its fundamental changes that took place at the end of the First World War. Research sources constitute the materials of the Federal Archive of Switzerland, namely the official and personal correspondence of the Swiss ruling elite of certain period and representatives of international organizations.

**Key words:** The Swiss Confederation, the Versailles-Washington system of international relations, humanitarian policy, the refugees, the League of Nations, the Anschluss of Austria, the conference in Evian.

**Actuality of the research.** The report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees concerning the monitoring of the situation of refugee status seekers and refugees in Ukraine, which was introduced in July 2013 in Geneva, adverted that Ukraine has defined its goal as introduction of legislation, policy and practice of asylum in accordance with the international and European standards. United Nations High Commissioner assessed Ukrainian asylum system, including an assessment of procedures, quality of decisions regarding the mechanisms for granting refugee status, of work with children unaccompanied, as well as issues of reception and accommodation. After verification, the Office concluded that the asylum system in Ukraine has a number of serious shortcomings. We consider that for finding of solutions to some of policy issues concerning the refugees becomes relevant to study the experience of European countries, and especially the Swiss Confederation, which today can be described as a leader in this regard.

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, Swiss Confederation in the eyes of the international community had supported the image of asylum-country with special humanitarian mission. The basis for this was an idea about the fact that Swiss society because of its language, religious and political diversity, and a large number of political parties can provide shelter for respective categories of refugees. Such obligations of different groups based on the positions of solidarity, rather than on the general ideals of humanism. Thus simple ideology acted which explained the humanitarian obligations, together with a political non-inclusion as one of the most important goals of the nation's existence. But in the first half of the twentieth century by a number of objective factors Alpine republic was forced to change the emphasis of its refugee's policies. The topic of old Swiss "humanitarian tradition" was not once got raised during the accusations against the country, that occurred during a particularly hot international debate 1970 - early 2000's, because of the failure to provide full shelter for Eastern European natives, who were in needed.

**Contact with important scientific and practical tasks.** The selected line of research is part of a complex scientific topic that is part of the research project of Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine: "The restructuring of the global system of international relations: the historical imperatives and contemporary challenges." The contribution of the author consists of the scientific generalization of the main events and developments humanitarian policies of the Swiss Confederation in times of crisis Versailles-Washington system as a part of the international relations of thereof time.

**Purpose of the study:** to analyze the humanitarian policy of the Swiss Confederation in times of crisis of Versailles-Washington system of international relations.

**The state of scientific themes development.** The theme of Swiss humanitarian policy of the first half of the twentieth century quite diverse represented in the works of Swiss researchers. This is due to the scientific and political demand for such research, caused by the international debate over the period 1970 - early 2000's concerning the role of the Swiss Confederation in the war of 1939 - 1945. The leading position

in the Swiss historiography of the theme belongs to basic research of the Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland - "World War II" under the direction of Jean-François Bergier. In particular, the work "Switzerland and Refugees times of National Socialism"<sup>1</sup> presented the development of the Swiss humanitarian policy of interwar period, its financial and legal aspects of regulation, the role of government and non-governmental charitable organizations in policy regarding refugees, and so on. Notably, the work "Switzerland and Refugees times of National Socialism" presented the development of the Swiss humanitarian policy of interwar period, its financial and legal aspects, the role of government and non-governmental charitable organizations in formation of refugees' policy, and so on. Some aspects of the topic was raised in the works of Swiss researchers A. Abegg and R. Strebel<sup>2</sup>, P. Kury<sup>3</sup>, J.-Ch. Lambelet<sup>4</sup>, T. Maissen<sup>5</sup>, G. Roschewski<sup>6</sup>, G. Wanner<sup>7</sup> and others.

At the same time it should be noted that in the Soviet and Russian historical science there are no specific basic scientific works regarding the selected themes and the relevant Ukrainian historiography is practically absent.

The Swiss Confederation has an old humanitarian tradition. Since 1515, it performed a shelter for refugees from religious and military conflict in Europe. In 1864 the Swiss entrepreneur Henry Dunant founded the Society of the Red Cross in Geneva, which still takes up the role of mediator between the warring countries protects and assists victims of armed conflicts and prisoners of war. Nevertheless, the liberal phase of the humanitarian policy of Swiss Confederation, which lasted from the second half of the nineteenth century, has changed radically after the events associated to the Great War of 1914 - 1918 years.

According to Swiss researcher P. Kury, the First World War led to the change of policy regarding foreigners in Switzerland. Under the influence of the war, social misery, fear of communism and integral nationalism in Switzerland were concretized protectionist ideas both in economic and in social policy<sup>8</sup>. From now all migrants in the Alpine republic were divided by criteria for "capable of assimilation" and "unable assimilation" („assimilierbaren“ und „nicht assimilierbaren“)<sup>9</sup>.

Switzerland, as a member of the League of Nations since 1920, faced primarily with the problems that were associated with two groups of refugees: Russians who fled after the revolutionary events of 1917 (a large group that included in administrative dimension Armenian refugees and different categories of refugees from Middle East) and Germans since 1933 (most of them where Jews who fled from racial harassment after National Socialists came to power)<sup>10</sup>.

As for the first category - the Russians and equivalent to them categories of refugees - experts from the commission of Jean-François Bergier reported that the Swiss authorities have not shown particular commitment in solving the question of their legal status. Switzerland took part in the relevant International

<sup>1</sup> Bergier, J.-F. (ed.) (1999). *Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus*. Bern

<sup>2</sup> Abegg, A., Strebel, R. (2005). Die schweizerische Flüchtlingsrechtspolitik des Zweiten Weltkriegs: Diskursive Brüche und Kontinuitäten im Schnittpunkt von Flüchtlingspolitik und Flüchtlingsrecht. <[www.forhistiur.de/zitat/0509abeggstrebel.html](http://www.forhistiur.de/zitat/0509abeggstrebel.html)> (2015, February, 09).

<sup>3</sup> Kury, P. Vom Überfremdungsantisemitismus zur Islamfeindlichkeit: Der Umgang mit Fremdheit und Differenz in der Schweiz von 1900 bis in die Gegenwart 21. <[www.paulus-akademie.ch/ressourcen/download/20100127160910.pdf](http://www.paulus-akademie.ch/ressourcen/download/20100127160910.pdf)> (2015, February, 18).

<sup>4</sup> Lambelet, J.-Ch. (2000). Kritische Würdigung des Bergier-Berichts «Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus». *Schweizer Monatshefte*. <[www.hec.unil.ch/jlambelet/deutsch.pdf](http://www.hec.unil.ch/jlambelet/deutsch.pdf)> (2015, February, 06).

<sup>5</sup> Maissen, T. (1998). Die Schweiz und die nationalsozialistische Hinterlassenschaft: Anlass, Phasen und Analyse einer neu entflammten Debatte. *Der Zweite Weltkrieg und die Schweiz. Reden und Darstellungen*. Zürich.

<sup>6</sup> Roschewski, H. (1996). Heinrich Rothmund in seinen persönlichen Akten. Zur Frage des Antisemitismus in der schweizerischen Flüchtlingspolitik 1933–1945. *Studien und Quellen. B. 22*. <[www.amtsdruckschriften.bar.admin.ch/viewOrigDoc.do?ID=80000196](http://www.amtsdruckschriften.bar.admin.ch/viewOrigDoc.do?ID=80000196)> (2015, February, 20).

<sup>7</sup> Wanner, G. (1998). Flüchtlinge und Grenzverhältnisse in Vorarlberg 1938-1944. *Rheticus Vierteljahresschrift der Rheticus-Gesellschaft. H.3/4* <[www.erinnern.at/bundeslaender/e\\_bibliothek/seminarbibliotheken.-zentrale-seminare/an-der-grenze/229\\_Gerhard\\_Wanner.pdf](http://www.erinnern.at/bundeslaender/e_bibliothek/seminarbibliotheken.-zentrale-seminare/an-der-grenze/229_Gerhard_Wanner.pdf)> (2015, February, 11).

<sup>8</sup> Kury, P. Vom Überfremdungsantisemitismus zur Islamfeindlichkeit: Der Umgang mit Fremdheit und Differenz in der Schweiz von 1900 bis in die Gegenwart 21. <[www.paulus-akademie.ch/ressourcen/download/20100127160910.pdf](http://www.paulus-akademie.ch/ressourcen/download/20100127160910.pdf)> (2015, February, 18).

<sup>9</sup> Kury, P. Vom Überfremdungsantisemitismus zur Islamfeindlichkeit: Der Umgang mit Fremdheit und Differenz in der Schweiz von 1900 bis in die Gegenwart 21. <[www.paulus-akademie.ch/ressourcen/download/20100127160910.pdf](http://www.paulus-akademie.ch/ressourcen/download/20100127160910.pdf)> (2015, February, 18).

<sup>10</sup> Bergier, J.-F. (ed.) (1999). *Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus*. Bern, 35.

Conference 26 - 28 February 1933 but remained in the background and did not sign the final agreement. And when in 1936 the League of Nations High Commissioner invited Switzerland to join the agreement with the amendment, that "the Russians and equivalent to them categories of refugees will enjoy all rights which are stipulated in the agreement," it refused, citing to fact that this agreement addresses issues that are relevant to the competence of the cantons<sup>1</sup>.

Regarding refugees from Germany the leadership of the League of Nations was going to apply the same measures as for the Russians, Armenians, and equivalent to them categories. In July 1936, this topic was discussed at a conference in Geneva, where "Interim Agreement from 4 July 1936 concerning the legal status of refugees from Germany" was produced. Once again Switzerland has not signed the agreement, and expressed a desire to see how many and which countries would ratify it firstly. Switzerland has signed and acceded to the Agreement on 18 August 1937. The reason for the delay was the fear that it would be forced to provide long-term intake of refugees from Germany<sup>2</sup>.

The absolute majority of historians – researchers of Swiss humanitarian policy of the first half of the twentieth century – led many facts about how this country was trying to say in the international arena and assert its role as a transit country for refugees and not as the country of final settlement. The leading role in this process belonged to the diplomat and the head of the Federal Migration Police of the Swiss Confederation Heinrich Rothmund, who more than once has represented his country at international conferences of interwar time. Although, after Second World War, he often was accused of anti-Semitism, especially after the appearance of the widely known report of Karl Ludwig in 1957. Researcher G. Roschewski stressed that his activities should be considered in connection with the political and the spiritual mood of the Swiss society of that time<sup>3</sup>.

According to Professor G. Wanner, Switzerland's position as a transit country was determined not by external pressure after the occupation of Austria, but its origins in 1933 – Federal Department of Justice and Police had already determined that the refugees would not be guaranteed any fixed place of residence, work permit, or state financial aid. In addition, Jews (mainly German Jews - author's note) should not be observed as a political refugee<sup>4</sup>.

This idea was supported by the local authorities. The political system of Switzerland provides an extremely extensive power of the cantons in the political and socio-economic spheres. Thus the federal law "About the residence and settlement of foreigners" from 1931 (entered into force on January 1, 1934) was built on the principle that local authorities at their own discretion and individual interests of the land determined the number of foreigners which can afford. The law embodied a concept, named "The concept of the ability to receive" ("Konzept der Aufnahmefähigkeit"), that was already in use for a long time. It had been considered in connection with the "level of foreign domination" ("Grad der Aufferfremdung"), which in turn is complemented by cultural and economic criteria<sup>5</sup>.

The law defined three different types of residence for foreigners:

- 1) the settlement (Niederlassung), which was based on an indefinite stay;
- 2) restriction to stay for two years;
- 3) so-called "tolerance permit" (Toleranzbewilligung), which was limited to stay from three to

six months and may be granted to persons, who for various reasons have lost their documents and could not confirm the nationality of its own<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, the humanitarian policy of the cantons had significant differences, which we can see from the increasing number of individual facts of providing shelter or failure in it during 1930 - 1940-ies.

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<sup>1</sup> Bergier, J.-F. (ed.) (1999). *Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus*. Bern, 37-38.

<sup>2</sup> Bergier, J.-F. (ed.) (1999). *Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus*. Bern, 39.

<sup>3</sup> Roschewski, H. (1996). Heinrich Rothmund in seinen persönlichen Akten. Zur Frage des Antisemitismus in der schweizerischen Flüchtlingspolitik 1933–1945. *Studien und Quellen. B. 22*.  
<[www.amtsdruckschriften.bar.admin.ch/viewOrigDoc.do?ID=80000196](http://www.amtsdruckschriften.bar.admin.ch/viewOrigDoc.do?ID=80000196)> (2015, February, 20).

<sup>4</sup> Wanner, G. (1998). Flüchtlinge und Grenzverhältnisse in Vorarlberg 1938-1944. *Rheticus Vierteljahresschrift der Rheticus-Gesellschaft. H.3/4* <[www.erinnern.at/bundeslaender/e\\_bibliothek/seminarbibliotheken.-zentrale-seminare/an-der-grenze/229\\_Gerhard\\_Wanner.pdf](http://www.erinnern.at/bundeslaender/e_bibliothek/seminarbibliotheken.-zentrale-seminare/an-der-grenze/229_Gerhard_Wanner.pdf)> (2015, February, 11).

<sup>5</sup> Abegg, A., Strebel, R. (2005). Die schweizerische Flüchtlingsrechtspolitik des Zweiten Weltkriegs: Diskursive Brüche und Kontinuitäten im Schnittpunkt von Flüchtlingspolitik und Flüchtlingsrecht.  
<[www.forhistiur.de/zitat/0509abeggstrebel.html](http://www.forhistiur.de/zitat/0509abeggstrebel.html)> (2015, February, 09).

<sup>6</sup> Abegg, A., Strebel, R. (2005). Die schweizerische Flüchtlingsrechtspolitik des Zweiten Weltkriegs: Diskursive Brüche und Kontinuitäten im Schnittpunkt von Flüchtlingspolitik und Flüchtlingsrecht.  
<[www.forhistiur.de/zitat/0509abeggstrebel.html](http://www.forhistiur.de/zitat/0509abeggstrebel.html)> (2015, February, 09).

Generally, by describing the humanitarian policy of Switzerland of interwar time regarding these two groups of refugees, experts from the Bergier Commission emphasized that Switzerland wished to be wholly owned by a group of liberal countries and participate in international conferences on refugees, but at the same time relentlessly punctuated by its "special case". Swiss authorities wanted as much as possible, keep its "integral neutrality" regarding the Italians and the Germans, and adhere to their trade policy, financial interests and security<sup>1</sup>.

Most of the debate about the humanitarian policy of the Swiss Confederation during the Second World War came down to the question of legality, and the consequences of the closure of the state border in 1938 and 1942. Right after the war and before the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Swiss authorities have been forced to look for excuses and explanations for their actions and to prove the legality of such decisions.

The metaphor that became popular expression already at the end of 1940 - 1950-ies and still demonstrate the position of Swiss Federal Council, "a completely filled lifeboat" ("stark besetztes Rettungsboot"). It belongs to Federal Councilor Eduard von Steiger, which he used to explain the necessary actions regarding the refugees in Switzerland the Second World War<sup>2</sup>.

The first aggravation of the situation around the Swiss border was due to the Anschluss of Austria by Nazi Germany on 12-13 March 1938, which led to the inevitable increase of desirous to leave the country and seek refuge in the well-known of its humanitarian tradition neighboring Swiss Confederation.

Anschluss of Austria caused a global crisis in the issue regarding the refugees. The initiative to find ways of solving it belonged to the United States. In accordance with it the US government conducted a series of negotiations with the European countries in order to find opportunities for taking of emigrants from occupied Austria. Not once have been treatment to neutral Switzerland. However here, knowing the possible consequences of very liberal refugees' policy, the Swiss authorities have behaved quite restrained. In particular, the note by Alfred de Claparede from the Department of Foreign Affairs Political Department to the head of the Police and Justice Heinrich Rothmund on 26 March 1938 concerning the participation of Switzerland in the humanitarian activities of the United States said that "It is practically impossible to show disrespect to the initiative of the US government. Nevertheless, in response to the memorandum must be reserved, that Switzerland, being ready to promote their part to address the problem of fundamental considerations of humanity and in cooperation with other countries with the necessary care, at the same time paying attention to its special demographic situation and the policy conditionality of its ethnic relations can be considered by political refugees only as a transit country. What about the desire of the US government, the relevant committee may hold its first meeting in a Swiss city, but frankly speaking, perspective of this is not attractive enough; we fear that the committee may decide later to stay by us, and we, despite our obvious attitude towards migrants, have no interest this committee decided to stay<sup>3</sup>."

After founding none of the necessary understanding among large countries, the Swiss Confederation was forced to solve the problem itself. Therefore, on 28 March 1938 the Federal Council approved the introduction of a visa regime for the Austrians to oppose emigration, which was supported by the new regime<sup>4</sup>.

The reaction on the appropriate actions of the Swiss authorities relating to the Anschluss of Austria, G. Wanner explains in such a way: Switzerland considered the Anschluss of Austria as the relevant to the international rules, as well as justified and as so, which cannot be challenged. Any interest of Austria in eventually would be considered a violation of neutrality<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Bergier, J.-F. (ed.) (1999). *Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus*. Bern, 43.

<sup>2</sup> Kury, P. Vom Überfremdungsantisemitismus zur Islamfeindlichkeit: Der Umgang mit Fremdheit und Differenz in der Schweiz von 1900 bis in die Gegenwart 21. <[www.paulus-akademie.ch/ressourcen/download/20100127160910.pdf](http://www.paulus-akademie.ch/ressourcen/download/20100127160910.pdf)> (2015, February, 18).

<sup>3</sup> Le Chef de la Division de Police du Département de Justice et Police, H. Rothmund, au Haut-Commissaire adjoint pour les réfugiés sous la protection de la Société des Nations, G. Kullmann (1939). <<http://db.dodis.ch/document/14261>> (2015, July, 01).

<sup>4</sup> Abegg, A., Strebel, R. (2005). Die schweizerische Flüchtlingsrechtspolitik des Zweiten Weltkriegs: Diskursive Brüche und Kontinuitäten im Schnittpunkt von Flüchtlingspolitik und Flüchtlingsrecht. <[www.forhistiur.de/zitat/0509abeggstrebel.html](http://www.forhistiur.de/zitat/0509abeggstrebel.html)> (2015, February, 09).

<sup>5</sup> Wanner, G. (1998). Flüchtlinge und Grenzverhältnisse in Vorarlberg 1938-1944. *Rheticus Vierteljahresschrift der Rheticus-Gesellschaft*. H.3/4 <[www.erinnern.at/bundeslaender/e\\_bibliothek/seminarbibliotheken.-zentrale-seminare/an-der-grenze/229\\_Gerhard\\_Wanner.pdf](http://www.erinnern.at/bundeslaender/e_bibliothek/seminarbibliotheken.-zentrale-seminare/an-der-grenze/229_Gerhard_Wanner.pdf)> (2015, February, 11).

At the same time the Swiss authorities tried to solve the problem of excessive influx of refugees through negotiations with Germany. In this situation, the Federal Council has demonstrated a willingness to make concessions, but not contrary to its fundamental interests. So Heinrich Rothmund in a note dated August 3, 1938 about negotiations with German Ambassador Sigismund von Bibra on the issue of refugees from occupied Austria, describing the situation of illegal border crossing, appealed to the good neighborly relations between the two countries: "I recall that a large number of refugees who went to Switzerland in a disordered way, without doubt contact with the Swiss population, what can create the mood which can harm to the good relations with Germany. Switzerland could take some Jews, whom it allows entry and temporary staying until the final decision of formalities for the selective settlement. We are talking about Austrian Jews, who have related business or friendly relations with persons living in Switzerland, who are ready to accept them. These people are carefully selected, whereby requires to behave calmly in Switzerland and sow discord".<sup>1</sup>

However, diplomatic actions have not given the desired result. The next step was the disposal of the Federal Council dated 19 August 1938, which defined the border closure for all owners of Austrian passports without a visa. The reason for this is specified in the relevant protocol: "Germany took no action on the appeals concerning the reduction of the entry of Austrian Jews, conversely contributed to increase the flow of people, who want at all costs to seek asylum in Switzerland; and finally, after the Swiss Jewish leader explained that it is impossible financial, they have no choice but to cross the border illegally, and border guards have to send them back. The Federal Council on the request of the Department of Justice and Police shall issue relevant instructions to stop further influx of refugees from German Austria. Finance and Customs Department (Higher Customs Directorate) and the Military Department will support the Department of Justice and Police through the necessary reinforcements."<sup>2</sup> This order was updated September 7, 1938. From now the refugees without a visa, especially the Jews, who were expelled should have make a mark "denied" in their passports<sup>3</sup>.

Resonant event in the modern history of Switzerland was the introduction in October 1938 a special mark of a letter "J" for passports of "non-Aryan" citizens of the Third Reich, which was preceded by complex and lengthy negotiations in September - October of the same year. Experts from the Bergier Commission exploring this issue came to the conclusion that if the documents cannot give a definite answer on that, Germany or Switzerland was first to offer a special mark for the passports, they can give a clear explanation that the initiative and the dynamics which led to such discrimination, were preceded by Switzerland. Switzerland was looking for an opportunity to identify and control a particular group of the population, namely the German and Austrian Jews<sup>4</sup>.

Of course, Swiss reluctance to make concessions to the big countries in the acceptance and placement of refugees on its territory has complicated its position in the international arena on the eve of the Second World War. The difficulties encountered Alpine republic in relations with the London Committee evidences this for Refugees, which was created by the results of the conference in Evian in July 1938. As already mentioned, at first, Swiss authorities acted distantly from the actions of the Committee and initiatives of large countries, but after it became clear the failure of one small neutral country to solve this rather complex issue, changes in its foreign policy occurred. In a rather emotional letter of Heinrich Rothmund to the head of Department of Foreign Affairs Political Department Pierre Bonna on April 23, 1939 it's talking about alarming rates, which acquired the refugee problem in Switzerland, the reasons for such a drastic change of course, and making a request about possible assistance. The author finishes the letter with the words: "Forgive me for such a strong interest. You know that in Evian, I worked in the other direction. But today, I really cannot see more than another way, as a committee in London. The reasons why the issue of further emigration should be resolved, I do not need to explain. Help me please"<sup>5</sup>.

In April-May 1939, Swiss Confederation searched for the ways of developing relations with the

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<sup>1</sup> Notice du Chef de la Division de Police du Département de Justice et Police, H. Rothmund (1938) <<http://db.dodis.ch/document/15353>> (2015, July, 01).

<sup>2</sup> Conseil fédéral Procès-verbal de la séance du 19 Août 1938. <<http://db.dodis.ch/document/15356>> (2015, July, 01).

<sup>3</sup> Abegg, A., Strebler, R. (2005). Die schweizerische Flüchtlingsrechtspolitik des Zweiten Weltkriegs: Diskursive Brüche und Kontinuitäten im Schnittpunkt von Flüchtlingspolitik und Flüchtlingsrecht. <[www.forhistiur.de/zitat/0509abeggstrebler.html](http://www.forhistiur.de/zitat/0509abeggstrebler.html)> (2015, February, 09).

<sup>4</sup> Bergier, J.-F. (ed.) (1999). *Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus*. Bern, 85.

<sup>5</sup> Le Chef de la Division de Police du Département de Justice et Police, H. Rothmund (1938). <<http://db.dodis.ch/document/14317>> (2015, July, 01).

London Committee. In a secret letter of Heinrich Rothmund to Gustav Kuhlmann, the Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees under the auspices of the League of Nations, on May 9, 1939 between the things was going about the request of assistance in achieving of this goal. Explaining his position Rothmund wrote: “You know about my letter of 28 July 1938 to Mr. Taylor, President of the Intergovernmental Committee at that time. In addition, in support of what I said to Mr. Taylor verbally after the end of conference, the Federal Council could not have to be present at the committee meeting in London on August 3, 1938. Nevertheless, it was pointed out that the Federal Council will review the opportunity to be represented at later meetings, if technical questions would be raised, especially the position of Switzerland as a transit country for emigrants from Germany. In addition, I appealed to Mr. Taylor with a request to ask the Secretariat of Committee to send me a report and decisions of the conference from 3 August. I have no confirmation of receipt of this letter, not the aforementioned material about the conference on August 3 as a result”<sup>1</sup>.

In the same letter, words of confirmation that Switzerland recognizes its inability to solve the problem by themselves, but does not change the position of a transit country can be found. “I know that the Federal Council will continue to make efforts to address the issue of refugees at the international level and will exhibit its full respect and support in the future. The severity is that practical assistance in dealing Switzerland, if the recognition of its role as a transit country will be considered to possible limit. Unfortunately, to this should be added that we now get pangs from anywhere. From the beginning, we have appealed to the humanity, and especially to the Neighborhood of Germany. We opened the border for the persecuted. However, is still nowhere in countries which are open to emigration, no open the gate for them. And now we're standing as a state, which has a fairly restless situation with foreigners, morally and financially burdened by unemployment, overcrowding of the elements whose long stay can bring only inconvenience for us and them”<sup>2</sup>. Further: “If the rack and secured leaving (of emigrants - author's note) will be possible, we can contribute to practical solving of problems as a transit country for the benefit of the basic idea of Mr. Roosevelt, and we do it very willingly”<sup>3</sup>.

Summarizing it should be noted that the humanitarian policy of the Swiss Confederation during the period of crisis of Versailles-Washington system was determined in the first place by consequences of the First World War, namely the fear of the extreme radical movements and changes in socio-economic policy. In 1920-30<sup>th</sup> in the spotlight of Swiss humanitarian policy were two large groups of refugees: immigrants from the former Russian Empire and Nazi Germany. Their acceptance and assimilation were accompanied by measures of demographic and economic nature, enough aggravating for Switzerland.

Sharing the idea of the absolute majority of experts on the modern history of Switzerland, we can conclude that all the diplomatic efforts of the Confederation of period 20–30-s of XX century were aimed at protecting the role of a transit country for refugees. The confirmation of these facts can be found both in official international documents as well as in official and personal correspondence by Heinrich Rothmund – the diplomat who played a key role in shaping of the humanitarian policy of that period, with the federal government and representatives of international organizations.

Directly stringent measures of Swiss humanitarian policies were supported by objective circumstances: limited resources, difficult situation on the labor market, creating a threat of conflict with neighboring states. There are also logical explanations for the sudden changes in the Swiss foreign policy during a certain period. Selected initially detached position of the Swiss Confederation in relation to the humanitarian initiatives of large countries, especially United States, driven by the desire to protect their own interests and to avoid conflicts with neighboring countries, whom it was depended in an economic sense, was changed with the development of an escalation of international tension over the 1938. The reason for this was the understanding of failure to reach an agreement with Germany through the diplomatic steps by themselves. Therefore, the Swiss Confederation was forced to soften its position and to seek

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<sup>1</sup> Le Chef de la Division de Police du Département de Justice et Police, H. Rothmund, au Chef de la Division des Affaires étrangères du Département politique, P. Bonna (1939). <<http://db.dodis.ch/document/14260>> (2015, July, 01).

<sup>2</sup> Le Chef de la Division de Police du Département de Justice et Police, H. Rothmund, au Chef de la Division des Affaires étrangères du Département politique, P. Bonna (1939). <<http://db.dodis.ch/document/14260>> (2015, July, 01).

<sup>3</sup> Le Chef de la Division de Police du Département de Justice et Police, H. Rothmund, au Chef de la Division des Affaires étrangères du Département politique, P. Bonna (1939). <<http://db.dodis.ch/document/14260>> (2015, July, 01).

support from Western countries.

This experience was decisive for the ruling elite of Switzerland to further developments of events. In the next few years, the Alpine republic was forced to spend even tougher humanitarian policy, not counting on international support, culminating of it was in the complete closure of the borders in August 1942.

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