

Paper by Anja Huber, University of Bern: Restrictions against Swiss nationals in England during the First World War

Abstract: The First World War brought fundamental changes not only to the societies of the belligerent powers, but also to those of countries not directly involved in military operations. In this context, the relationship of Swiss nationals to the authorities of the belligerent countries and the diplomatic efforts of the Swiss government to protect Swiss citizens abroad are important aspects that have so far been neglected by the research community, both in Switzerland and abroad. This contribution will therefore focus on how Swiss citizens living in the nations at war were suspected of being “enemy aliens” and were drawn into the upheaval and the rapidly changing power structures and relationships. Anti-alienism expanded well beyond the category of the so-called “enemy aliens” and even targeted neutral aliens. Using the example of the restrictions against Swiss nationals in England, some problem areas with respect to the treatment of neutral nationals in belligerent countries are to be addressed.

Unlike the many other countries which suffered millions of casualties, Switzerland was not drawn into the conflict and succeeded in holding on to the concept of integral neutrality for the entire duration of the war. Nonetheless, with regard to the many and diverse exchange processes that took place between Switzerland and the belligerent countries, the war also had a decisive impact on the Swiss nation.¹

Loyalty to one’s own country and the protection of one’s home from the threat posed by real or imagined enemy aliens were key factors in the context of war and could lead to the restriction of individual liberties.² Therefore, how to deal with minorities and foreigners in wartime became pivotal³ and this was equally true for foreigners in Switzerland as for Swiss nationals abroad. In this context, the relationship of Swiss nationals to the authorities of the belligerent countries and the diplomatic efforts of the Swiss government to protect Swiss citizens abroad are important aspects that have so far been neglected by the research community, both in Switzerland and abroad. This paper shall therefore focus on how Swiss citizens living in nations at war were suspected of being “enemy aliens” and were drawn into the upheaval and the rapidly changing power structures and relationships. Anti-alienism expanded well beyond

¹ Inside Switzerland the tensions along the linguistic borders were exacerbated during the war. It opened a trench in which to a certain extent the fronts of the First World War continued as an ideological conflict. There was an internal division of Switzerland between Entente supporters and “Germanophiles”, of which the Swiss citizens abroad were also affected. See for example: Schneider, Oliver, *Diktatur oder Bürokratie? Das Vollmachtenregime des Bundesrates im Ersten Weltkrieg*, in: Roman Rossfeld, Thomas Buomberger, Patrick Kury (Hg.), 14/18. *Die Schweiz und der Grosse Krieg*, Baden 2014.

² Cf. Nagler, Jörg, *Nationale Minoritäten im Krieg: »Feindliche Ausländer« und die amerikanische Heimatfront während des Ersten Weltkrieges*, Hamburg 2000, p. 13.

³ See Panayi, Panikos, *Minorities in Wartime: National and racial groupings in Europe, North America and Australia during the Two World Wars*, Oxford 1993. Further studies in this regard are Fischer Gerhard, *Enemy Aliens. Internment and the Homefront Experience in Australia 1914–1920*, St. Lucia 1989; Bird, John C., *Control of Enemy Alien Civilians in Great Britain, 1914–18*, New York 1986 and Panayi, Panikos, *The Enemy in our Midst. Germans in Britain during the First World War*, Oxford 1991.

the category of the so-called “enemy aliens” and even targeted neutral aliens. Using the example of the restrictions against Swiss nationals in England, especially Swiss hotel and restaurant employees, some problem areas with respect to the treatment of neutral nationals in belligerent countries are to be addressed. The central questions are: What did it mean to be Swiss in England after the outbreak of war? What did neutrality (and humanity) mean for a Swiss in England? What measures did the Swiss government take to protect his citizens in England against anti-alienism?

Swiss nationals abroad

The Swiss government understood emigration fundamentally as a private matter. Since 1888 there was a Federal Emigration Office, which oversaw the emigration agencies and kept a rudimentary statistic and the Federal Labour Office informed the Swiss about job opportunities abroad. But there was no official institution with the main purpose to maintain the relationships between the Swiss communities abroad and their home country.⁴ The only activity of the government in relation to the Swiss colonies abroad consisted in the establishment of consulates and in a small financial support for their associations. The consulates were designed to protect Swiss nationals in the consular district and at the same time functioned as an information exchange for the export industry by supplying regular economic reports. The consulates operated also as communication channels for the government to its own nationals. In the 19th century there were only a few Swiss general consulates, honorary consuls almost exclusively occupied the posts.⁵ The Swiss nationals abroad organised themselves on a private basis in various clubs. The social aspect of the clubs usually deployed on one of the three national pastimes: singing, gymnastics and shooting.⁶ The associations were also places where the limits of what it means to be a Swiss national abroad were negotiated. The Swiss government supported the function of the clubs as relief associations for needy members and gave them thus a partially official character.⁷

In 1914 the “Neue Helvetische Gesellschaft”⁸ (NHG) was established. Its foundation was a patriotic program that devoted itself to the fight against “national hazards” such as immigra-

⁴ Cf. Kreis, Georg, «Eine Brücke zu fernen Brüdern». Das Wirken der Auslandschweizer Organisation (ASO) (1919-1939), in: Brigitte Studer, Caroline Arni, Walter Leimgruber, Jon Mathieu, Laurent Tissot (Hg.), Die Schweiz anderswo. AuslandschweizerInnen - SchweizerInnen im Ausland, Zürich 2015, p. 224.

⁵ Cf. Zangger, Andreas, Koloniale Schweiz. Ein Stück Globalgeschichte zwischen Europa und Südostasien (1860-1930), Bielefeld 2011 (1800-2000, Kulturgeschichten der Moderne Bd. 6), p. 410.

⁶ Cf. Zangger, Koloniale Schweiz, p. 417.

⁷ Cf. Zangger, Koloniale Schweiz, p. 423.

⁸ New Helvetic Society.

tion, emigration and the "Ausländerfrage"⁹. During the First World War a broad circle of political and civil society supported the activities of the NHG. The society strove to integrate the Swiss nationals abroad in the cultural and political identity of Switzerland. In November 1916 delegates of the organisation developed a plan for the organisation of the Swiss citizens abroad. In this context the term "Auslandschweizer"¹⁰ was defined for the first time: „Die Auslandschweizer müssen sich vor Augen halten, dass der Begriff *«Auslandschweizer»* Pflichten in sich schliesst; wer von Ihnen aus nur rein materiellen Interessen Verständnis von der Heimat fordert und aus innerer Not oder Bedürfnis eine engere Verbindung mit dem Vaterland nicht herbeisehnt oder vielleicht für solche Regungen sogar nur ein überlegenes Lächeln übrig hat, der verdient den Namen Auslandschweizer nicht.“¹¹ According to this definition, not all Swiss nationals living abroad were therefore automatically classified as "Auslandschweizer". To be a real "Auslandschweizer", you had to fulfil some moral criteria.

The "Auslandschweizerorganisation" was institutionalised in 1917 and various groups abroad were established. On July 7, 1916 the society in London was founded. This group was very important for the entire movement and its organisation of propaganda. It built a powerful Swiss information service, which was well informed about the developments in London and constantly worked on breaking down prejudices against Swiss.¹² The groups of the NHG abroad grew constantly in the following years, their number increased from 9 in 1918 to 155 in 1925.¹³

The treatment of the Swiss nationals abroad by belligerent nations formed the subject of numerous interventions and multiple annoyances for the federal authorities during the First World War. Their number is estimated at approximately 375'000 to 400'000.¹⁴ Despite their neutral position, many Swiss citizens abroad were suspected of being "enemy aliens", were arrested, detained or even expelled.¹⁵ A common phenomenon in the First World War was furthermore the confiscation of the assets of (enemy) aliens in the warring states.¹⁶ According

⁹ Issues concerning foreigners.

¹⁰ The translation of the term is not very clear: Swiss Abroad, Swiss nationals abroad or Swiss citizens abroad.

¹¹ NHG Monatsbulletin, Juni 1917, p. 9. Translation: "The Swiss nationals abroad must keep in mind that the term 'Swiss Abroad' includes obligations in itself; whoever demands understanding of the home because of purely material interests and not longs for a closer connection with the homeland out of inner need or desire or perhaps has only a superior smile left for those emotions, does not deserve the name Swiss Abroad."

¹² Cf. Lätt, Arnold, Die Auslandschweizeraktion der Neuen Helvetischen Gesellschaft, Zürich 1919, P. 12.

¹³ Cf. Arlettaz, Gérald, La Nouvelle Société Helvétique et les Suisses à l'étranger (1914-1924). Aspects de la construction d'un nationalisme de type ethnique, in: Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv (Hg.), Die Auslandschweizer im 20. Jahrhundert, Bern 2002, p. 42-45.

¹⁴ Cf. Kreis, Georg, Insel der unsicheren Geborgenheit. Die Schweiz in den Kriegsjahren 1914-1918, Zürich 2014, p. 34.

¹⁵ Cf. Ruchti, Jacob, Geschichte der Schweiz während des Weltkrieges 1914-1919: politisch, wirtschaftlich und kulturell, Bern 1928-1930, p. 288f.

¹⁶ Cf. Ruchti, Schweiz, p. 289.

to calculations by the Swiss diplomatic missions, the total monetary damage caused to Swiss in all belligerent countries amounted at around 72 million Swiss francs. Therefore, after war, a credit to the granting of loans to damaged Swiss nationals abroad was made available by the Swiss authorities.¹⁷

In 1919 the NHG finally established a permanent secretariat for the Swiss citizens abroad. Its duties were as follows: Maintaining relations between Swiss and Swiss subsidiaries, representing the interests of the homeland and its citizens abroad, tracking the world's press and establishment of a propaganda ministry in favour of the Swiss. Thus the role of the Swiss nationals abroad as ambassadors for their country was definitely recognised and the NHG even started to speak of a “fourth Switzerland” abroad.¹⁸

Swiss nationals in England

At the beginning of the First World War around 16'000 Swiss were living and working in England.¹⁹ Many of them had built up an existence in their adopted country over the years and were engaged in local Swiss clubs. In particular, the Swiss community in London was very large and well networked. A large number of Swiss also worked as seasonal workers in England, mainly in the hospitality and the industrial sector. With the outbreak of war, the Swiss in England were confronted with a completely new situation. On one hand, a part of them returned voluntarily or under military pressure (summoning for military service) to their home country. On the other hand, German-speaking Swiss in England were suspected as “enemy aliens”, limited in their freedom of movement and business activities and in some cases arrested under suspicion of espionage or even expelled. The trigger for this action was the so-called “spy fever” which became more virulent during the course of the war in England. Patriotic writers, commercial and patriotic motives became entwined here. There was a fear of a German invasion and every German or German-speaking living in England was under general suspicion.²⁰ Especially in 1915 several articles were published in English newspapers in which German-speaking Swiss were suspected of espionage in England. It was said in an article in the Sunday Times from July 1915, that the Germans had erected a huge intelligence apparatus in Bern and that they also tried to win Swiss women and girls for corporate espionage: *„In some cases the Swiss women is sent direct to some awaiting her in one of the allied countries – either the employer is a subject of that country of German origin in league with*

¹⁷ Cf. Ruchti, Schweiz, p. 290.

¹⁸ Cf. Arlettaz, Société Helvétique, p. 62.

¹⁹ Cf. Lätt, Arnold, Die Auslandschweizeraktion der Neuen Helvetischen Gesellschaft, Zürich 1919, p. 8.

²⁰ Cf. French, David, Spy Fever in Britain, 1900-1915, in: The Historical Journal Vol. 21/2 (1978), p. 356.

the German secret service or there is an organisation in the capital for filling vacancies for governesses, nurses, teachers, waitresses, etc., with neutral women who are German spies."²¹

Anti-German feeling generally ran high in London, the windows of the "Swiss Bankverein" were smashed for example and to avoid future misunderstanding the name was changed to "Swiss Bank Corporation".²²

Throughout the war 31 Swiss were expelled from England, including only one French-speaking Swiss, the rest of the exiles came from the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Compared to the number of expulsions of Swiss citizens from France (290) and Germany (120) is this, however, a relatively small number.²³ With regard to naturalisation requests by Swiss nationals in England, a look at the statistics shows that the number of requests reached its peak in 1915 (101 applications, 1914: 20, 1916: 42), the year in which the anti-German feelings in England run especially high.²⁴ The Swiss embassy in England tried throughout the war to educate the British authorities and the public opinion about the fact that a Swiss must not in principle be suspected just because he speaks German or has a German-sounding name. However, the embassy had to deal with the problem that many "Reichsdeutsche"²⁵ in England were hiding themselves behind the "Swiss Flag".²⁶

The attitude of Swiss nationals in England towards neutrality

The Swiss embassy in London published in October 1914 a leaflet with instructions for the Swiss in England. It emphasises that Switzerland has declared its strict neutrality at the outbreak of war and that this decision has various obligations for the Swiss. Especially abroad, it was important that the Swiss would waive any action, demonstration or statement, which might undermine the neutrality of Switzerland and could violate the national feeling of the English. It states that who behaves differently proves not only lack of tact and gratitude but also endangers the interests of the whole Swiss colony and indirectly of entire Switzerland.²⁷

The Swiss Institute in London organised in December 1914 a public meeting of the established Swiss in England because of hatefulness and neutrality violations in the Swiss press. In the widely attended meeting the institute regrets the partiality of a part of the Swiss press to-

²¹ Swiss Federals Archives Berne (BAR): E2200.40-05#1000-1626#964*, Comité d'action pour la Défense des Intérêts suisses en Irlande-Bretagne, 1915.

²² Cf. Wraight, John, *The Swiss in London. A history of the City Swiss Club 1856-1991*, London 1991, p. 42.

²³ Cf. BAR: E2001B#1000-1501#2077*, *Ausweisungen aus England*. Allgemeines, 1919.

²⁴ *Sinking of the Lusitania: On 7 May 1915, she was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat, causing the deaths of 1,198 passengers and crew.*

²⁵ Translation: citizens of the (German) Reich.

²⁶ Cf. BAR: E2200.40-05#1000/1626#964*, Comité d'action pour la Défense des Intérêts suisses en Irlande-Bretagne, 1915.

²⁷ Cf. BAR: E2200.40-05#1000/1624#990*, *Manifestations diverses de la Colonie suisse de Londres pour exprimer des sympathies pro-anglaises*, 1914.

wards the warring states. The assembly therefore welcomes „[...] *die Massnahmen des Bundesrates und die Bemühungen weitsichtiger, patriotischer Privatmänner aller Parteien aus allen Teilen der Schweiz, die gesamte schweizerische Presse an die Pflichten zu erinnern, welche die neutrale Stellung unserem Lande auferlegt.*“²⁸ In another declaration the violation of neutrality of Belgium by Germany is convicted and the cordial relationship with England is emphasised.

More information on the attitude of the Swiss colony in England in terms of neutrality can be found in a letter of a member of the London City Swiss Club to the president and the members of the club in November 1914. In it the dominant role of the Germans in Switzerland is discussed and their impact on the Swiss population and press is criticised. The member calls the City Swiss Club therefore „[...] *to prevent the misdirection of public opinion by certain press organs, who – unfortunately from a national point of view – like a good many other Institutions in Switzerland, are too closely bound up with foreign elements.*“²⁹ He also condemns the German invasion of Belgium and draws attention to Switzerland’s economic and financial dependence on the neighbouring countries. He therefore sees the role of the Swiss citizens abroad in the war as a passive one: „*Let us remain strictly neutral in words as well as actions, and treat friend and foe alike, as it is none of our business to interfere in the upheaval that is going on around us, and our sympathy or antipathy can have no bearing on the final issue.*“³⁰ Rather than get involved into the war, the Swiss should therefore prefer to focus on their moral and intellectual qualities and try to maintain the friendship with the other nations. The letter ends with a request to the City Swiss Club to make known the views of its members to the Swiss ambassador in England and the Swiss authorities and to urge them to give English and French views and reports as much prominence as “has hitherto been given to information received from German sources”.³¹

The support of Swiss nationals in England for Switzerland’s humanitarian work

During the First World War Prisoners of War (POWs) benefited from a series of exchanges that allowed certain classes of prisoners to spend their captivity in neutral Holland and Switzerland. The exchange of seriously wounded French and German prisoners began in March 1915. In August 1915 the French government agreed that less seriously wounded POWs could

²⁸ BAR: E2200.40-05#1000/1624#990*, Manifestations diverses de la Colonie suisse de Londres pour exprimer des sympathies pro-anglaises, 1914. Translation: „[...] the measures of the Federal Council and the efforts of far-sighted, patriotic private men of all parties from all parts of Switzerland to remind the Swiss press of the obligations which the neutral position imposed our country.”

²⁹ BAR: E2200.40-05#1000-1624#963*, City Swiss Club, 1914.

³⁰ BAR: E2200.40-05#1000-1624#963*, City Swiss Club, 1914.

³¹ Cf. BAR: E2200.40-05#1000-1624#963*, City Swiss Club, 1914.

be placed in the care of a neutral government. In January 1916, the first 200 French and German tubercular cases were transferred to Switzerland. By the middle of February, over a thousand such prisoners had arrived. In May 1916, the British government struck a similar agreement with Germany, and British and Empire prisoners began arriving in Switzerland.³² The soldiers were not, as originally planned, housed in specially created camps or military lodgings, but in vacant buildings of the Swiss tourism industry. By the end of 1917 nearly 30'000 internees occupied 195 hotels, guest houses, hospitals and sanatoriums throughout Switzerland. The admission of military internees was an important economic factor for the country, especially for the ailing tourism industry, as well as a political strategy to defend its own neutrality in- and outside the national borders.

According to the diplomatic sources of the Foreign Office, the arrival of British prisoners in Switzerland was welcomed joyfully in the British press. In various articles Switzerland was accorded recognition for its humanitarian work. In the documents it is stated that the reception at Lausanne of British Prisoners of War interned at Chateau d'Oex was enthusiastic. There was an ovation by about 2'000 people, principally Swiss, who distributed charitable gifts. In his speech, the British consul emphasised that England and Switzerland had always been good friends and addressed himself with the following words to the British soldiers: *"Yesterday and to-day, you experienced another frantic reception, not only on the part of your country people but also from all the Swiss, and from many foreigners, who like you, have found in this small country, so much respected by all nations, complete hospitality, complete liberty, until complete justice can be obtained for all tears shed!"*³³

The Swiss clubs in England were also committed to the British POWs. For example, an activity of the City Swiss Club in London was the entertainment of Swiss medical missions visiting England to select German wounded and sick prisoners of war to be exchanged for British wounded and sick prisoners of war in Germany, or to be taken to Switzerland for further treatment. On June 1, 1916 the Club gave a dinner for a mission of eight medical officers led by Lieutenant-Colonel Karl Sturzenegger. The group had visited all the English camps and hospitals in which wounded German prisoners were confined, having performed a similar task in Germany with the British wounded. The president of the Club presided over the dinner. The Swiss minister, the staff of the Swiss Legation and the principal members of the Swiss

³² Cf. Vance, Jonathan Franklin William, *Encyclopedia of prisoners of war and internment*, Millerton, N.Y 2006, p. 283.

³³ TNA: FO 566/1868.

colony in London supported him.³⁴ The Swiss minister expressed his appreciation of the articles, which had appeared in the British press, paying tribute to the humanitarian qualities of his country as evinced in the treatment of the British wounded just arrived in Switzerland.³⁵ The Club gave another dinner in September 1917 for a second Swiss medical mission, this time headed by Lieutenant-Colonel Chatelanat. In his speech the vice-president told the gathering that strict neutrality was the only possible policy for Switzerland, given the country's geographical situation, the international composition of the people and the historical traditions, but Switzerland did not stand apart: "*She flung wide the doors of her country to the wounded prisoners of all the combatants and tried to heal their physical and mental bruises.*"³⁶

Restrictions against Swiss restaurant and hotel employees in England

Especially restaurant and hotel employees were often affected by xenophobic agitation due to their professional activities. The employee association of Swiss hotel and restaurant staff, the Union Helvetia, complained in a letter to the Swiss minister in England in November 1915 on wrongful arrests of its members. Here, the accusation is expressed that the Swiss authorities advocates not or insufficient for their compatriots in such cases.³⁷ In the response a few days later the Swiss minister defends his effort, pointing out that other neutral aliens suffer much worse conditions. He indicates further that in this difficult situation, extreme caution on the part of the Swiss nationals abroad is appropriate.

Another letter to the minister by a private individual, pointed once again to the fact that Swiss restaurant and hotel employees were harassed in England: The writer talks about the hostile feelings, which were „unfortunately prevalent in this country“ and reports on the demand of the English Ladies Societies that employed girls of Swiss nationality, whether French- or German-speaking, should suspend their engagement in England. He invites the minister then to take immediate steps to safeguard the interests of this „innocent people who are made to suffer.“³⁸ However, this is little understood by the minister and he responds that a direct action against such movements by the embassy was not possible, although the suspicions against the Swiss in most cases are probably unfounded. But as long as it is not possible to

³⁴ Cf. Wraight, Swiss, p. 45.

³⁵ Cf. Wraight, Swiss, p. 45f.

³⁶ Cf. Wraight, Swiss, p. 46.

³⁷ Cf. BAR: E2200.40-05#1000/1626#964*, Comité d'action pour la Défense des Intérêts suisses en Irlande-Bretagne, 1915.

³⁸ Cf. BAR: E2200.40-05#1000/1626#964*, Comité d'action pour la Défense des Intérêts suisses en Irlande-Bretagne, 1915.

show very concrete facts, the minister has to restrict himself in consultation with the Foreign Ministry to speak of a “unseren Landsleuten im Allgemeinen übelwollenden Bewegung”.³⁹

In a report to the Federal Political Department the minister describes the situation of the Swiss in England in more detail: Above all, the members of the Union Helvetia in London were affected by xenophobic tendencies; the hotels were threatening to dismiss the Swiss employees and refuse to hire them for their companies. In addition, the authorities and the military observe them with suspicion and sometimes even arrest them. He sees the reason for this actions in the exposed situation of the hotel staff: „*Les employés d’hôtel sont naturellement les plus exposés, l’hôtel dépendant de sa clientèle et étant considéré par la police comme un lieu où l’espionnage peut se pratiquer facilement.*”⁴⁰ The hotels developed in the course of the war to places where spies met and information was exchanged. The Swiss hotel staff in England found themselves right in the middle of these developments.

The Union Helvetia established therefore in 1915 a committee against the xenophobic movement with the aim to advice on measures against the hostilities on the part of the English public and press. The committee proposed to set up a larger organisation together with other associations of Swiss nationals abroad in the country. This should defend and improve the reputation of the Swiss in England with concrete counteractions. The Union Helvetia asked the Federal Political Department therefore for a basic capital. The minister responded: „*J’ai fait remarquer à ces Messieurs que les neutres établis dans un Pays belligérent sont forcément exposés à des tribulations; ils ne peuvent pas raisonnablement demander de pouvoir vivre aussi tranquillement qu’en temps de paix, uniquement parcequ’ils sont neutres.*”⁴¹ He states that to live as a neutral national in a belligerent country does not mean to be spared from the domestic implications of the war and to be able to continue life quietly. He also points out that the Swiss are not treated less favourably than other neutral aliens in England. The British authorities have interned many of them, a measure of which the Swiss have so far been spared. According to the minister, another problem is that, although the tendency to boycott neutral nationals exists, no negotiations are possible through diplomatic channels, because the British authorities not officially support the movement. He sees the education of the British popula-

³⁹ Translation: „our compatriots generally malevolent movement“.

⁴⁰ BAR: E2200.40-05#1000/1626#964*, Comité d'action pour la Défense des Intérêts suisses en Irlande-Bretagne, 1915. Translation: „The hotel employees are naturally more exposed, because the hotel depends on its clientele and is considered by the police as a place where espionage can be done easily.”

⁴¹ BAR: E2200.40-05#1000/1626#964*, Comité d'action pour la Défense des Intérêts suisses en Irlande-Bretagne, 1915. Translation: „I pointed out to these gentlemen that established neutral nationals in a belligerent country are heavily exposed to tribulations; they can not reasonably require to live as quietly as in peacetime, only because they are neutral.”

tion through the press as the most effective remedy against xenophobic tendencies. The minister therefore wants to support the creation of a larger committee on a private basis, but without direct financial support of the Federal Political Department. In return, he promises to strongly proceed against any hostility against the Swiss in England on the part of British authorities.

The minister informed the Federal Political Department on his decision. It responded to the minister as follows: „*Nous partageons entièrement votre manière d'envisager la situation plutôt difficile dans laquelle se trouvent nos compatriotes et nous sommes aussi d'avis qu'une action officielle de la Légation pour remédier à cet état de choses ne donnerait aucun résultat appréciable.*“⁴² Furthermore, it is stated that the Federal Political Department could not provide financial support for the Union Helvetia in England, as it has rejected several requests of Swiss organisations in other belligerent countries where the situation of the Swiss is even more difficult.

The action was then implemented as proposed by the minister: The committee - consisting of the interest groups of the restaurant and hotel staff - received no official character, but published on a private basis regularly comments in the British press against slanderous articles. The comments also went over the desk of the minister and he adapted them with an eye to the official position of Switzerland. His corrections are mainly interesting in relation to the adaptation of the terms: The minister demands that it is spoken consistently of "Swiss citizens" not of "Swiss subjects", because the Swiss is not a subject, and the term "Swiss German" should generally be avoided because there are no different "types" of Swiss.⁴³

An article in the "Berner Tagblatt" from July 1916 reports that English newspapers are rushing with chauvinistic tinge against German-speaking hotel employees. They accuse them of an anti-British attitude and spying for the opposing party. The "Berner Tagblatt" argues that in the light of recent events - the arrival of the British internees in Switzerland - this has caused "justified indignation" in Switzerland. The newspaper accuses the Swiss embassy of inaction, as it has never officially taken position in this matter. In response to these developments the committee of the "Union Helvetia" reinforced its public relations in England. There

⁴² BAR: E2200.40-05#1000/1626#964*, Comité d'action pour la Défense des Intérêts suisses en Irlande-Bretagne, 1915. Translation: „We fully share your way of considering the rather difficult situation in which our compatriots are and we are also of the opinion that a formal action of the Legation to remedy this state of affairs would give no appreciable result.“

⁴³ Cf. BAR: E2200.40-05#1000/1626#964*, Comité d'action pour la Défense des Intérêts suisses en Irlande-Bretagne, 1915.

were articles in English newspapers and magazines published in which the pioneering role and importance of English travellers in the Swiss tourism industry and the strong bonds of friendship between the two nations were pointed out.⁴⁴ Also the Union Helvetia reminded the English population in diverse articles of the humanitarian services of Switzerland for the British soldiers and the strict neutrality of the country. The issue should nevertheless remain relevant throughout the war and the Union Helvetia saw itself repeatedly forced to stand against slanderous articles.

Conclusion

The Swiss citizens in England, especially German-speaking individuals and employees of the hospitality sector, became victims of invasion fears and/or were even targeted as “enemy aliens” by the English press and population during the war. Therefore, the organisations of the Swiss in England felt compelled to react. Throughout the war they published various articles in the British press, in which the neutrality of Switzerland, its humanitarian activities and the long friendship between the two countries were emphasised. They also fought against the one-sidedness of the Swiss press and the supposedly strong German influence in Switzerland. And with the awareness of the importance of Switzerland’s humanitarian commitment in the warring countries, the Swiss in England supported the aid for the British POWs. But in general, they saw their role in the belligerent state as a passive and neutral one.

The Swiss authorities called on the Swiss nationals in England to remain strictly neutral with respect to political matters. And the Swiss embassy tried throughout the war to educate the British authorities and the public opinion about the fact that a Swiss must not in principle be suspected just because he speaks German or has a German-sounding name and that there was no difference between a German-, French- or Italian-speaking Swiss national. Although the Swiss in England demanded greater effort for their protection, the Swiss authorities remained rather passive during the war. It was repeatedly pointed out that no negotiations were possible through diplomatic channels and that the Swiss were not treated less favourably than other neutral aliens in the country.

In conclusion it can be said that in the case of England, the Swiss authorities saw neutrality as an art of compromise, which demanded aloofness rather than activity of the Swiss representation and the Swiss nationals in the country. The Swiss nationals themselves tried to find a synthesis of contributing as much as possible to the society of the country where they lived as well as to their native homeland.

⁴⁴ Cf. BAR: E2200.40-05#1000/1626#964*, Comité d'action pour la Défense des Intérêts suisses en Irlande-Bretagne, 1915.