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**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW OF**  
**CORNELIO SOMMARUGA**

**BY**

**THOMAS G. WEISS**

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Transcribed by Joseph Sramek

THOMAS G. WEISS: This is the beginning of tape number one. It is the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2001. Cornelio Sommaruga is being interviewed in his office in Geneva, Switzerland, by Tom Weiss, accompanied by Sophie Theven. Good morning.

I wonder if you could begin by telling us a little about your family background and the extent to which this contributed to making you the person that you are, that you became. And in particular how did this contribute to your interests in multilateral cooperation?

CORNELIO SOMMARUGA: It's a very interesting question. I asked myself several times how this family background has contributed to what I later became. And I believe, yes. I believe very much so. I think it's important to take into account that I am a Swiss citizen from abroad, *un Suisse de l'étranger*. This is not a question of language because I am from the Swiss canton of Ticino, which is an Italian-speaking part of the country (seven, eight percent of the population of Switzerland speaks Italian). This is my mother tongue. But my mother was Roman, and I grew up in Rome, Italy, where I was born.

And here, the interests come from the combination of my father and my mother. My father came from Lugano, his home city—according to Swiss law now my home city because we have *jus sanguinis*. He studied economics in San Gallen and Bern, and then he emigrated to London, and from there he went to Rome. But I think in this background what is important is why did he go to Rome. Because one of his aunts became later on my *marraine*. She was a widow of another Ticinese who had emigrated in Central Europe and then to Italy and introduced in Italy the *betterave à sucre*. How do you say that in English? I don't remember.

TGW: Sugar beet.

CS: He created a sort of an empire in a few years on the sugar beets. He then became an Italian, a double citizen, and he made politics in Italy. He became, and this is a first interesting detail, a vice-president of the Italian Red Cross. And at the beginning of the First World War, he was the president of a commission for war prisoners. They had no children. He died during the First World War, and certainly for my aunt it was a problem to see how to enlist her patrimony. And finally at this moment, the beginning of the 1930s, she asked her nephew, the oldest of her nephews, my father, to come to Rome.

And if I say all that, I think it's because you have to consider that first of all, from the family of my aunt, I was in a certain sense introduced in a certain circle of Italian public life. And my mother then came in. My grandfather from my mother's side was a professor of pediatrics at the University of Rome. He was then a *senatore del regno*, these were the members of the senate appointed by the king. And finally, what was perhaps the most important aspect, he was the private doctor of the royal family of Italy, for the children. And this gave another circle of people around our family. These were all the acquaintances of my mother related to the Italian royal family—I believe not too much with the fascistic regime. But I would not exclude that my grandfather, the *senatore del regno*, had certain connections with personalities around [Benito] Mussolini—as for example, [Luigi] Federzoni or [Dino] Grandi.

I was born in 1932. My father was working for a bank and for his aunt. He was later requested by the then Swiss minister—we had no ambassadors at that time—to join the Swiss legation in Rome in order to deal with foreign interests. This was 1939-40. I was eight years old, and my father decided to do this.

So then suddenly to this more Italian world I had around me came in a sort of a diplomatic world and a diplomatic world that was rather special. What was the task of my father? To protect first British and then French and then later on American interests and the interests of many other countries. What was also interesting was that this protection meant that he had his officers in these embassies—even the French embassy to the Holy See because it was in Rome—and these diplomats had to live inside the Vatican.

There was then a parenthesis, which in my life counted very much. It was June 1943. As usual my father always insisted that his six children, of which I was number one, always went to Ticino for summer holidays, in order not to lose contact with Switzerland. And there was a family house in Monteceneri just in the middle of the canton of Ticino. And we went there, and my mother with the children stayed there. My father went back to Rome. And then there was the landing of Allied troops in Anzio, near Rome. And my father said: “Don’t move, because probably the front will move before you are arriving!” So I have not witnessed in Rome the important political events of the fall of fascism in July 1943, and the change of the Italian new regime with the king leaving Rome, going to Bari, and signing an armistice in September 1943. But I have witnessed something else quite extraordinary.

My mother stayed with the children during two years in Lugano. I went to school there and this was important because I then created a network of friends in Switzerland. And my father, in Rome with his diplomatic task, was very close to the Vatican at that time to save people, and one of his friends was the later on Pope Paul VI, Monsignor Giovanni Battista Montini. And having his own network of people before, as I said—from my mother, the royal family; from his aunt, the old political and economic

establishment. He had a lot to bring to my mother in terms of information. And on the other hand, my mother in Ticino, was in the middle of all of these refugees who had come from Italy, from all kinds of families, also a lot of Jews. And my father had taken in our apartment in Rome a number of Jews, because the children were no longer there and he had room. And this was very badly seen by the Nazis at the time because he was known to protect them. But in principle, legally, they couldn't do anything to him because he had diplomatic immunity.

Well I could go on in many detailed stories. I wish not to do it here. Perhaps an important aspect is that I was able to save the old correspondence, the letters that my father had sent to my mother at that time, through the diplomatic courier, and lately I have given them to the Swiss Federal Archives, and they are open. They are interesting because he describes, for example, when he was the first one going in the *Fosse Ardeatine* when there had been those massacres perpetrated by the Nazis and other surprising circumstances.

I went back in 1945 to Rome. I was then a little older; I was twelve. I certainly then woke up to see this world. My father didn't remain in the diplomatic service; he continued to work as an *avocat d'affaires*. But I had by then this insight of the problems of the war seen by a child, then this consciousness to be Swiss—very strongly so. And at the same time, I had seen a lot of people, because my parents were inviting people whom they knew to their home. I was then one of the leaders of the Boy Scouts in Italy after the war, because I had been in the Boy Scouts in the two years at Lugano. I was going to school, to a college of Jesuits, and all that brought me to my *maturité, baccalaureat, la Maturità classica Italiana*. And at that time the question of my university studies came

up and my father was very severe. You have to gain, “*tu dois gagner ces études,*” you have to show that you are worthy of this. And this depends on your results of the examination for the *maturità*. And they were not too bad, so that I could go to university studies, but with a stringent budget.

And then it was very important for me to say, “I wish to go to Switzerland.” And my father was in agreement with what I asked. I said, “I wish to go to the German part of Switzerland,” because we had a larger knowledge of French through my mother. The family of my mother had a branch coming from France, and she spoke very good French. She wanted us always to speak French, at the dinner table, the lunch table. We hated that, my brothers and sisters and myself. And I was later grateful to my mother because I knew so much French and then I learned German through my university studies.

And there are two interesting details. I say that, if you wish to know more of my background it is that my father said, “Never speak *Schwyzerdütsch* during your studies, otherwise you will never learn *Hoch Deutsch*.” And the second thing he said to me was that “you are going to study law because you want to become a diplomat, and I think you will be a bad diplomat. You will not be enthusiastic at all of the classical diplomatic career. If you wish to serve your country in this kind of work, you should go directly to economic diplomacy, à la *division du commerce*.” I didn’t know what it was. And it’s interesting that fifteen to twenty years afterwards, or a little more, I became the head of this *division du commerce*, a sort of minister of trade in Switzerland. My father died during my studies, but I never forgot that.

Now as to my motivation, after having said all that. Certainly I had discovered a lot of things in my youth, first of all the disasters of the war. Even if I was not involved

directly, I heard, I saw, I felt, the problems of the war. Secondly, I had heard a lot about what diplomats were trying to do around me. Also, the old problem of these connections between refugees and their families, that my mother tried to realize—the work of my mother in the Swiss Red Cross in the two years when she was in Lugano.

And then something that I have often said, I think, this maybe also for other nationalities, but I am speaking of Switzerland: the Swiss of abroad, either they deny any connection with their country and they integrate completely in their new societies, or they have a sort of idealistic view of their own country that brings them to say that they wish to do something for their country. And this was my case. I had a very idealistic view of Switzerland, and I wanted to do something for Switzerland.

And finally, why did I want to become a diplomat? Because I thought this was a sector where I may be successful in helping my country, knowing languages, knowing a little bit of the whole atmosphere. Even if the way was not the easiest one to follow. Why am I here? That is a particular question. I was very little Swiss. I had a Swiss passport. I had the Swiss idea. But in my own character, in my own knowledge from the studies, almost all, I was an Italian. I knew very little Swiss history or Swiss ideology, and therefore I made an effort, and you may find that strange. When I arrived at the university—I was just about to turn twenty years old—in Zurich, I engaged myself in the military service. Well it was compulsory, but I did it very intensively because I always thought that the army would give me the possibility to know other Swiss, to know Switzerland, and to learn about the mentality of Switzerland. I would like to say that indeed this aspect of the army brought me a lot for what later on was important for me. And perhaps it saved me also in the *concours diplomatique*, because in this *concours*

there were a lot of basic questions on Switzerland. There was an interesting detail that we had to make a *rédaction* for the *concours diplomatique*, and the title was “colonization.” And certainly the ideas of those there were that one would attack the big world problems, because it was just at the end of the 1950s, the time of the decolonization process. I made another choice and probably it was a good choice, because I showed that I was able to address Swiss problems. I spoke about colonization of the Italian-speaking canton by the German-speaking cantons in history. And trying to show what was negative and what was positive, because finally one has not to forget that the Canton Ticino made a revolution in 1789 saying *liberi ma svizzeri*. Free from Napoleon, free from the Swiss, but we wish to be Swiss, that is to say we wish to be a sovereign canton of Switzerland.

TGW: I wonder whether we might go back a little bit and investigate the impact of great events. I just wonder whether you recall the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, and whether this struck you as strange or normal, and whether there was any depiction in Italy or in the family about the role of the League of Nations—the failed role, the good role, and so on. Did this enter into any discussions?

CS: Well not necessarily at that time because I was only a child. The invasion of Abyssinia was in 1935 and I was born in 1932, so it would have been difficult even to grasp. But I had a lot to do and study later on, because as president of the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) dealing first with Mengistu [Haile Mariam] and later on with the successors, I had to be aware of what happened and the problematic role of the Red Cross at that time. And I then saw what the Italians did.



But when you talk about the League of Nations there is an important detail—perhaps two that I should mention. The League of Nations was very often mentioned by a brother of my mother, my uncle, Claudio Valagussa, who became an Italian diplomat. His dissertation, which was published, was on the League of Nations. He must have done that at the end of the 1930s or at the beginning of the 1940s. So I began to be aware that there was something of this kind when I was around ten years old or somewhat before.

Secondly, the League of Nations also played a role in the family of my mother, because of a great Italian diplomat, Spinelli, who was later on, the first director-general of the UN (United Nations) headquarters in Geneva. But he had been in the League of Nations before, up to the time when Italy was in the League of Nations. I think it was 1938 or so that they were thrown out or they withdrew. And he was coming to see my parents later on, and therefore I had a certain idea. There is in Geneva—I did not know what was Geneva—something where people from different nations were trying to get together. Geneva became then for me very important because in two years during the war, the only time when we were able to see my father was when he came from Rome through Algiers, through the so-called free part of France to Geneva. And he met my mother in Geneva, and we spoke to him on the telephone from Geneva. So I discovered that there was a town called Geneva. But this was again when I was ten or eleven years old.

TGW: What about two years later? Obviously the trauma of the Depression, the trauma of the Great War, this experiment called the United Nations was begun. How was this presented in school? And was there any attention paid to the need to do something

different from the first experiment, the League of Nations? Was there any role attention paid to economic cooperation, which was a significant portion of the new institutions?

CS: I must say frankly that I have no recollection at all that in the school in Italy anything about the United Nations was taught to us. But the daily reality of Rome brought me to think about the United Nations. UNRRA (UN Relief and Rehabilitation Agency), the refugee organization, was created after the Second World War, and I saw the parades of the cars around me and people coming and going, civilians but wearing some kind of uniforms. And then I put some questions to my father and I recall I received a certain number of explanations of the refugee work conducted by the United Nations, but without going back to what was San Francisco, why, and so on.

Second aspect, it is interesting to recall that the first specialized organization that I heard about was UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Why? Simply because of my father. After the war, Monsignor Montini—he was not pope at that time, he was minister of foreign affairs for the Vatican—called my father and said: “Liberia is asking me to have a minister to the Holy See. And we wish to have a person of a neutral country accepting to do that.” And indeed my father accepted that. It was a more honorific way, but he had a lot to do because he had to go to conferences. And he was a delegate of Liberia in Florence. I think if you go back in the history of UNESCO, there must have been around 1948 or 1949 a general conference of UNESCO there. I remember my father coming back and explaining to us what it was and why.

I then even through this function of my father had the occasion to go to Liberia with him. And I saw President Tubman and Vice President Tolbert, and there again I had a certain impression of activities, activities of the UN, of international organizations.

Exactly what it was I couldn't tell you. But in any case there were representatives of the United Nations participating in the inauguration of President Tubman. Therefore I again saw this. This was at the end of my *lycée*. This was around 1950 or 1951.

TGW: So this was your first encounter with what would become the Third World? How did it strike you?

CS: Well it was extremely interesting. But I think I saw the wrong place. Because the first thing that I realized in Liberia, and it was not my only journey—later on I went again—there was this contradiction among black Africans, those coming from America and the natives. And this was very evident. For a young man I was beginning to wake up. I was twenty. I saw there was something wrong. But in a certain sense I was very confident for a sound economic development of this part of the world because I didn't see real poverty. I traveled around the country. I was there something more than a fortnight, and I had no intention of participating in all the celebrations. It was amusing that I offered myself to be the driver of the then-Nuncio. I don't know what he was exactly, the Apostolic administrator, an Irishman. And he said: "Yes, I have to make a journey inside the country. You can drive my car if you so wish." And so I saw a lot of things. And also I felt that those important investments made by the Americans, Firestone; by the Swedes in the steel sector; and then other investments there, were made in a way that people were supportive, interested. There was an orderly development including all of the natives.

So I came back with impressions that there was something to do. Nothing to gain money there, but to help sound development. And this is the reason why, at the end of my studies, I was working two and a half years at a bank in Zurich. They had interests in

Africa and there was a problem in Liberia and I went. As a young doctor in law not knowing very much about economics, I went for three weeks to study what could be made.

TGW: At the university did you begin to study public international law?

CS: Yes.

TGW: What attracted you? Did you think about staying at the university, teaching and writing as opposed to moving into practice?

CS: No. I never had the intention to have an academic career. I am not keen on writing. How many speeches I've, however, later written and lectures prepared for others. People are saying that I am now a good communicator, but I think I was not at all in my young years. I never learned that. I would not have felt I would have been good there. But, I certainly had an interest in aspects of international public law and in constitutional law in the comparative sense. And finally my *thèse de doctorat* at the University of Zurich is a comparison of constitutional law between Italy and France in the position of the head of state in the new constitutions that came up after the war, *la Quatrième République* and the new republican constitution of Italy.

But what was for me interesting was to follow seminars in the university on public international law and particularly the functioning of international organizations. And there was my first appraisal of the United Nations. The professor is still living, very old, who was teaching that course. The very young assistant scholar helping him in these seminars was Dietrich Schindler. He later became a professor of international law at the University of Zurich. He became one of my colleagues—well he was there before, he elected me—as a member of the ICRC, and we have become best friends. At that time I

was looking at him as one of my teachers. At the University of Zurich at the beginning of the 1950s the UN was a reality through international public law.

TGW: And why didn't you go into diplomacy immediately? And how did you get into diplomacy?

CS: I always had the intention, but there was a rule in Swiss diplomacy at that time that one couldn't enter diplomacy directly from university studies. Candidates should have had two years of practical professional life. There was no prescription what, and I made the choice of banking only because my father, before dying, had asked me: "Try to be at least a little bit aware of economics and financial problems. Go to a bank." And I did that. But I must say at that time I had a lot of military service, and I then became a captain, one of the youngest captains at that time in the Swiss army. And this militia army, in order to advance, requested not only training, but also a lot of effective service. I think, while having been a number of days, a number of years outside the country, I have a record of more than 1,000 days of military service. And this was largely done at this time, before entering diplomacy.

TGW: At the beginning of your banking career, and not at the beginning of your diplomatic career, one of the main events that obviously changed the face of diplomacy was rapid decolonization. How do you recall reacting to this large influx of newly independent countries? And did you think it would make a big difference in international affairs?

CS: I thought it could. I would not say that I studied that in any significant way, but certainly decolonization was a reality that came in during my university studies, during what happened afterwards. And I told you that it was the theme of the work we

had to do at the *concours diplomatique*. So that in a certain sense, one was aware. And for me it was a welcome fact to see these countries coming to have their own responsibilities in the community of states. I did not understand, because I did not study them, what would be the big problems coming up linked to this decolonization. And certainly I was more introduced in that afterwards in the first years of my diplomatic career.

My wife recalled to me a few days ago that we had requested as young diplomats to be posted first of all in Eastern Europe, secondly in Latin America, and thirdly, in Africa. And this with the family growing. I have six children. When I entered the diplomatic career, we had three children and the three others were born there. But probably because of this large family the Department of Foreign Affairs never wanted to send me overseas. It cost too much and created too many problems. And therefore my diplomatic posts were in Europe, but were very interesting, also to follow what was happening across the globe.

Well, the first one was The Hague, a former colonial country; the second one, Cologne and Bonn; and the third one, Rome. They were before coming to Geneva and switching to economic affairs. Certainly from the Netherlands, particularly, and also from Italy, the problems of decolonization of the so-called Third World were never the priority of my work.

TGW: What was the official Swiss view toward the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)? Did this make sense to a neutral country?

CS: It's difficult to tell you the real situation at the moment when it was created in Bandung (Asian-African Conference). I was not yet following closely the matter. But

I always remember that Swiss diplomacy was following that very closely, making a great difference between *neutralité* and *neutralisme*, saying you must not mix them up.

Neutrality, which has an international statute, which is based on very clear laws, be they national or international and not based on a policy of equilibrium called *neutralisme*, that these countries, particularly the three *meneurs de jeu*—Egypt, India, Brazil—and others had followed in this respect. And I think there was in Bern, certainly, an openness.

But then in Switzerland, because of the neutrality, the great problem was always to see how we could be represented at such international conferences. What is the status that we could have there? Could we be observers? Perhaps it is too much, and we will not be accepted. Should we be going as invited members? And I think this went on for decades. And not only for the Non-Aligned, but also for a lot of other conferences. This was the big contradiction. When I came to the ICRC, this was 1987, I wished to pursue a policy of completely opening of the ICRC to all possible organizations in the world. We had to be accepted. But I wanted to be present in multilateral forums for two reasons. One, to pass messages in the multilateral arena as to international law about what was to be done. And second, to have the opportunity to meet people and to speak to people bilaterally about very difficult issues much easier than it would have been in a search of a bilateral contact. And it was sometimes amusing.

Swiss diplomacy was somewhat jealous of that. Because we were finally observers very early when I came, in the Organization of the Islamic Conference. And we were very active there. They wanted to have us, and the ambassador of this organization here in Geneva became one of our best friends. He was I think four or five times a year in the ICRC in order to inform himself. We became official observers in the

Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Organization of American States (OAS). I signed agreements of cooperation, and this was a little later, perhaps in the 1990s, with all of these organizations, even the Arab League. We had some places at their meetings, and I could go on. And certainly European organizations, the Council of Europe—I made a number of statements in the plenary of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Also with the European Union, and we may come to that later on.

I have pushed up to the moment when it was accepted that I go to the European political committee, where foreigners are generally never invited to go, and make statements about the state of the world. And with the United Nations it was a similar question. Perhaps I am anticipating a little bit?

TGW: That's fine.

CS: I felt that this distant attitude from the formal point of view in New York and even in Geneva could not help us. And my policy as president of the ICRC was to develop very open relationships with the Secretaries-General. I learned to know three, and I can say that they all became, in different ways, my friends. And at the beginning, I sought their support to discover means to make use of this very special organization, the ICRC. It is not an international organization, nor an NGO (nongovernmental organization). It has a mandate from the Geneva Conventions, that is to say from the states, but it is a mono-national institution at the top acting on the basis of this mandate. I wished to have a more efficient presence in the UN.

And I followed that through intensive contacts with the secretariat—not only myself, but also at the lower levels my associates—and the diplomatic world, particularly the Security Council. And I introduced something rather special, but extremely useful. I



think I had been two years at the ICRC, in 1989, when I had my first meeting with the Security Council. But I was myself inviting them. I wanted not to become a sort of hostage of their political game. I invited them regularly once a year, some years twice, at a working luncheon, and they came. I think only once I had fourteen and not fifteen. And generally they came at a very high level. I had Madeleine Albright twice at my lunch table. And some of these permanent representatives, because they were coming each year, became, if not my friends, very close acquaintances of mine. Sometimes I received telephone calls from New York from one of these diplomats.

And this brought at the beginning, during the time of Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, the famous move, very quick move, with the help of Carl-August Fleischauer, the legal counsel, when he wrote a paper on the legal status of the ICRC, of the particularity of the ICRC. A very peculiar resolution of the General Assembly accepted the ICRC as observer at the UN General Assembly.

What then created a number of problems for the follow-up, not for us, but for those who wanted to use this precedent? In the United Nations, at the acceptance of the resolution, it was said that this would be a *cas unique. Il n'y en aura pas d'autres.*" I am very grateful to the Italians, in presidency of the European Union, who helped us very much, as well as Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar helped us. And it passed.

Sorry I have opened this parenthesis, but starting from the Swiss diplomacy and speaking then of the ICRC, I wanted to show that Swiss diplomacy was always more reluctant to open up in the direction of international organizations because, I think, of neutrality. It is no longer the case at all now. Perhaps sometimes, in my view, one was

in the last years, taking lightly the permanent status of neutrality. But at that time and when I came to the ICRC, it was somewhat different.

Therefore, shall I really speak of jealousy of Swiss diplomacy in respect to the ICRC? It's perhaps a rather strong word but at least some astonishment—astonishment at the fact that the ICRC was so present in multilateral gatherings and this in addition to situations in the field where the ICRC head of the delegation, a young man of twenty-eight years, was received by the head of state, the minister of defense, and the minister of foreign affairs very quickly if he made the request. And the Swiss ambassador had to wait some months before being able to see them. These were completely different functions and activities.

But I think, finally, that I cannot complain that Swiss diplomats did not understand me, understand the ICRC well. And I have had the best relations with Swiss diplomacy

TGW: What were the pluses and minuses of Swiss neutrality during the Cold War? And are they still the same pluses and minuses now?

CS: It is difficult to say if they are the same pluses and minuses now. But I believe that in the Cold War there were a large number of pluses. Swiss diplomacy was able to influence the government to keep a standing neutrality policy according to international law and domestic traditions, without exceptions, but implemented in parallel with the other key words of Swiss foreign policy: solidarity, universality, and availability. Just this last concept was crucial. Despite the fact that they were not members of the United Nations, they were very much recognized in the world, perhaps also because of that non-membership. But they had also to bring something to the world

with good offices—I mean *les Bons Offices, die Guten Dienste*—and personalities. Particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, there were a number of Swiss who had been at the disposal of the United Nations. There has been the development of Geneva very much as a center for United Nations and for international conferences. And in this, Swiss neutrality helped a lot, but also, the powerful means provided by the federal government.

Then there has been also the role that Swiss diplomacy somewhat seldom made in some mediation efforts. So I think a lot of pluses. And one has never to forget what happened in 1945 and 1946 when Switzerland did consider joining the United Nations. And then it was Foster Dulles, the secretary of state of the United States, who made a very strong statement saying there is no place for those who did not participate in the victory, and we wish not to have neutrals in our circles. And this was confirmed in Switzerland. We stay outside the United Nations because we have a role to play outside, under a foreign policy of neutrality, solidarity, universality, and availability.

Now certainly there are some minuses not to be present where one should be at the right moment. But I don't think this has been really a problem. Much more has been, and this in my view should not be linked to neutrality, the fact of not being party to the Bretton Woods institutions for a long time. This has been a very special attitude of mine, fighting for an accession to the World Bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund). You know that the Swiss voted in 1986 on the joining of the United Nations and rejected it.

Well first of all this brings me back to the particularities of Switzerland. Switzerland is a very special country for many constitutional aspects. I think there has been no other country in the world that had to have a referendum in order to express if

they should join the United Nations or not. And the particularity of Switzerland is that federalism is playing a big role. According to the constitution, the majority has to be a double one, citizens voting in all of Switzerland, but also the majority of cantons, counting the votes of all of these twenty-three cantons. So you have tiny cantons in respect to Zurich which has 10 percent of the Swiss population. And at that time I was secretary of state for external economic affairs, and I was not pushing particularly this referendum on joining the United Nations, being worried on a possible negative vote. But I felt, when it came to this campaign, that I should *je devais me mouiller*, insert myself in a very visible way, and with economic arguments. Economic arguments, saying directly and indirectly what disadvantage this would mean for Switzerland not to be a member.

I even went to speak in certain very difficult spots. In the canton of Appenzel, they had a meeting of the General Assembly of the Chamber of Commerce of three cantons, the two Appenzels and San Gallen together. And they wanted to have a prominent speaker. And they asked me, and I said: "I'm coming. And I will speak on "The Economic Advantages of Switzerland to Be a Member of the UN." And they were extremely embarrassed because they were against, very much against. And then they wrote to me saying, "We are very glad to know that you are ready to come. But please change the title of your speech." And then I wrote: "If you wish to have me, it is this title. I wish to speak on that." And finally they accepted me. And it was a rather difficult situation coming in, with a room that was very cold. But there were 400 people—all of these small firms of the cantons of San Gallen, textiles, and so on. And the chairman who introduced me, introduced me in such a way that was extremely

negative, saying, “He wishes to come to speak on something that we do not wish to listen to.” And this was a very difficult start but finally, *c’était une réussite*: I had a lot of applause. Some newspapers published my speech entirely, and I had thought, “Well this is certainly something good.” I had made many other speeches.

Finally, as you know we had had a very bad result. *En rétrospective*, I must say that almost all my arguments were wrong. Because all of what I said, that it would be negative not to be a member of the United Nations, in economic terms, came out not to be the reality.

I could not participate in the next campaign, but I think this was a great day when the finance minister, a Social Democrat, finally was successful for joining the IMF and World Bank. People didn’t consider him very much, but I had good contacts with him. I always went to the meetings of the Bretton Woods Institutions to our *strapontin*, as observer there. And finally he pushed through the accession to the Bretton Woods institutions. It came to a referendum and he won the referendum! And the Swiss became a member of the World Bank and of the IMF through a popular vote, with a double majority. And this was extraordinary and unique.

I think that the Swiss sometimes, when they see which are the real economic points on the game, they vote in their own interest. It was the case, and now one year ago with the vote on the bilateral agreements with the European Union (EU). You know that Switzerland is not a member of the European Union. You know that Switzerland has negotiated—I did negotiate at that time actively—the free trade agreement that we have since 1972, that was accepted by referendum, but for the following negotiations, I was no longer there. There was a negotiation on the European Economic Space (EES), the

multilateral setting with the community (European Economic Community) at that time and a certain number of EFTA (European Free Trade Association) countries. And there was a referendum, but the government lost.

Finally Switzerland didn't become a member of this European Economic Space. And therefore, they negotiated bilateral agreements. It was very difficult because the Union said: "Well you wish not to be a member of this economic space. Why are you coming with this request?" But finally, they had an interest themselves too. And these are seven bilateral agreements touching also some very delicate questions, as for example the free circulation of persons, touching some aspects of agriculture. And finally, the referendum was of positive outcome.

And there was the recognition first of all that neutrality was not touched. We may come back to Swiss neutrality. And that there was an economic interest, medium-term, for Switzerland to be in this dynamic of bilateral agreement. And what is interesting is that Switzerland ratified very quickly in 2000, by popular vote. But these bilateral agreements are not yet in force (in January 2001) because some of the countries of the European Union are not yet ready to ratify them. What irritates a lot of Swiss now, and we are in a new phase of Switzerland's approach to the European Union because there will be in a few months a vote on an initiative, "*oui à l'Europe.*" Young people seek to put in the constitution an article requesting the government to negotiate and accept an agreement with the European Union. But it is completely ridiculous, in my view—not the fact of negotiating at a certain moment, but that the people are giving to the government such an order. And despite what the newspapers seem to say that there

would be half-and-half, we will certainly have a negative result, and this will again be very bad for the image of Switzerland.

But coming back to neutrality. I think that neutrality after the end of the Cold War has been reexamined because of two external elements. One is the political move in approaching the European Union and the other one is in relation to the United Nations and peacekeeping in more general terms. It was, I think 1991, a group of experts were asked to make a report on Switzerland and the neutrality of the future. This report was written by some professors—not necessarily the great known names—younger people, and some politicians. The report goes, in my view, very far. They say: “Neutrality yes, but we have to interpret in a different way how to carry out our neutrality. No problem”—they practically say—“no problem in joining the European Union.” In my view, this is not really possible, despite the fact that the Swedes, the Austrians, and the Finns are members of the European Union.

Swiss neutrality is different despite the fact that, in accordance with the Moscow memorandum between the Soviets and the Austrians of the 1950s, Swiss neutrality should be a model for the Austrians. The evolution of the neutrality of these countries has been completely different, and the Swiss have, for a long time, been much stricter in their own neutrality. And I think it was right. You may know that during the Gulf War, there was a discussion whether Swiss airspace would be opened for planes of the coalition. And these things are very delicate.

I think that they went very far in this approach in the report on neutrality. For me it was a very important report. But I was president of the ICRC. I tried to influence from the outside in order to show that the ICRC was something that the Swiss should leave

aside, without being concerned of their own neutrality policy, because of the ICRC. Because otherwise the ICRC would have become a matter of discussion in internal Swiss politics, which would have been extremely negative for the neutrality and the independence of the ICRC. And I was very pleased because finally they recognized that, in a special chapter on the ICRC. And this commission said what should be done was to conclude a headquarters agreement between Switzerland and the ICRC in order to underline its independence.

In a certain sense this may appear for some as *sacrilège*, because what is the ICRC? The ICRC is an association, according to Swiss civil law, of twenty-five Swiss citizens. It has a very special statute. They can only be Swiss. This association has later on received through the Geneva Conventions an international mandate. But the association is a Swiss one. To say that we wanted to have a headquarters agreement with privileges and immunities would have seemed rather complex. No, they did make a suggestion to the Swiss government. I was also happy because I worked for that behind the scenes for a long time. And finally the Swiss government offered to the ICRC to conclude such an agreement. In three months we concluded it. I signed it on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March of 1993, with the then federal councilor, René Felber. And what is interesting is that we have no privileges. I didn't want to have any privileges of a fiscal nature and so on. I wanted to have immunity. But I wanted to have something more. And this is Article 2, saying, "the Swiss federal government assures the ICRC of its freedom of action and full independence." And this is now in writing and it is important to show to others. I had no real problems with the Swiss, but I wanted this to be clear.



But let me come back. This was important for the neutrality because this means the Swiss can discuss about their neutrality, but not involving the ICRC. And I hope very much that my successor and my friends on the ICRC will stick to that. Otherwise it may become a very difficult situation to keep it's own independent neutrality if we come into such a discussion.

Now neutrality in Switzerland is still a controversial point. How much is it now in the forefront of affairs? It is difficult to say, but because one is approaching different matters from different angles I can imagine that when speaking again about the possibilities that Switzerland would join the European Union, this aspect of neutrality could come up. We will have later on another vote in Switzerland, a referendum, on the fact of arming those contingents of Swiss troops that are put at the disposal of international organizations, including the UN. For the time being Swiss law doesn't allow them to be armed. And there are ridiculous situations in Kosovo. They are there but they are in a contingent of the Austrians. The Swiss have no arms, and they are protected by the Austrians!

So now the parliament has voted for change of the military law, but there has been the request of referendum, according to Swiss legislation, and we will vote on that. And certainly this whole question of neutrality will come up again, even if it is somewhat wrong. But it is certainly very, very sensitive.

TGW: Well it's almost counter-intuitive for a small country that makes its living with so much trade and services. Most people would argue that multilateral participation and cooperation is preferable to a whole series of bilateral agreements. So I would have thought that the balance, both theoretically and actually, might lead in the direction of

participation. But this leads me to a question. Sophie dug up a quote and we were trying to figure out what this meant. You said that, “Switzerland should be *la conscience mondiale parmi les integrationistes européens.*” What do you mean? What is the conscience? You want Switzerland to be the world conscience among European integrationists?

CS: Among integrationists, but perhaps not only European. Well I can understand because I was speaking about economic integration, and I have been and still am very much in favor of free trade. In this sense, the way that I approached integration was purely economic integration, an integration through trade, service, and free circulation of professions of people having had the recognition of their title, free circulation also, as much as possible in financial terms. And if I spoke about that, it was probably fifteen years ago, and I was insisting on the fact that the experiences of Switzerland could have been a good model for others to see that a free trade area, as the EFTA free trade area, could function. Finally, it was rather amusing that the Canadians asked me, at the time I was secretary of state, to be somewhat their informal advisor in several aspects, such as in their negotiations with the United States on the free-trade area and on NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement).

This was also the relation between these free trade areas and the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade). The question was if these free trade areas were corresponding to Article XXIV of the GATT, as it was drafted, and if it would be accepted as a preferential reciprocal trade. I think that this is the sense that you have to give to the sentence I made at that time.

TGW: Well you finally followed your father's advice and got into the economic arena in the 1960s. This was a particularly volatile time in international economic relations. What was Switzerland's position? In particular, I am thinking of the UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development) context and then the Special Session of the General Assembly in 1974 for the New International Economic Order (NIEO). This debate was anything except trying to find a middle "Swiss" ground. This was confrontation. How did you feel in this context?

CS: Well first of all, allow me to say I came into economics at the end of the 1960s, in 1969 in Geneva. I continued until 1986, first of all in multilateral diplomacy in Geneva, and later assistant-secretary-general of EFTA, and finally the posts in Bern. Secondly, for Switzerland, economic interests were particularly in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries. And this was the main reason why certain political aspects came in. And it was amazing because at this time Switzerland tried to become a full member of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE). You understand, therefore, my friendship with Janez Stanovnic.

We had concluded a free trade agreement with the European Community and we were in EFTA. We felt that neutrality should show that we have an interest, also multilaterally, to the Eastern European countries and certainly the GATT. But the GATT was seen more as an instrument for free trade with those countries that were not linked with Switzerland in Europe—that is to say the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. It's later on that the new industrialized countries came up and played a major role in Swiss economic affairs.

Now in 1974, this famous Special Session of the General Assembly occurred. But I must say at that time, still being in Geneva, extremely oriented to Europe, I do not remember a special position taken by Switzerland in this respect. One of my first tasks coming to Geneva at the beginning of 1969 was to be also a deputy representative to UNCTAD. It was not really a great responsibility because many colleagues were regularly coming from Bern to Geneva in order to follow the various UNCTAD bodies. And the UNCTAD conference had just taken place in New Delhi, and the Santiago de Chile conference was in preparation. I did not go to either, but I was confronted here in Geneva with this very political, and for me not attractive discourse on economic relations, development, trade, and finance. It was really not agreeable, and not only in the relations with other groups, but already inside of Group B, very complex. I had to have discussions for almost three years around these themes. I had such appearances regularly in working parties or so, as a junior Swiss representative.

What I found interesting at that time in UNCTAD, where very concrete matters as the agreements on raw materials, as cocoa, coffee, sugar, and tin were discussed and where mechanisms were sought that could have given to the developing countries a certain level of regular earnings—the discussion was interesting but politicized. I wonder, for example, whether it would have been easier in the GATT to reach an agreement about trade preferences for the developing countries. I tried to give my contribution in the International Trade Centre, GATT/UNCTAD, which was a sort of training center for people of the developing world.

I must say that global economic affairs through the United Nations and specialized institutions became my responsibilities much later. Much later because you

may have seen from my curriculum vitae when I was called to Bern, and I became responsible for foreign trade issues, I had the responsibility of Europe first. And I discovered something quite new for me, and this was the planned economy of Eastern Europe. And I negotiated a lot of agreements and protocols. I was the head of all Swiss economic delegations with the COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) countries, with the exception of Cuba. I was then responsible for the economic policy toward the European Union, toward the EFTA countries and EFTA, and toward the countries of the European Union because we had a lot of bilateral agreements, to Spain and Greece that were not yet in one or the other. This gave me a lot to do. I was also responsible for the Economic Commission for Europe, and then I even became its president. And this was something quite exceptional—that the representative of a non-UN member country, while being a member of the UN regional economic commission would become the president.

It was interesting. It was the time of Janez Stanovnic. When I was vice president, the president was from the GDR (German Democratic Republic) and my vice president, when I was president, was Polish. And this was also interesting. Here, we come into politics, but not in the UN politics. This was the mid-1970s, and this was the Helsinki Final Act (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe). And we had all consequences of the second basket coming into the Economic Commission for Europe. And Switzerland played a certain role in the negotiation of the Final Act. There was the N Group and the N+N Group, and there we come back to the group of neutrals and nonaligned or something of this kind. And these were countries such as Yugoslavia, Malta the Vatican, and I don't know who else sometimes worked with the Swiss. But the

Swiss were very active in the third basket, human rights, and in the second basket, the economic basket. And the economic basket was then in the center of preoccupation of the Economic Commission for Europe, and I went with Janez Stanovnic to Belgrade to the follow-up conference of the Helsinki Final Act. He made the presentation, but I was there as the president of the commission.

Just one recollection on the role of Switzerland in the Final Act. I think it must be recalled that my former colleague and friend, Edouard Brunner, was later on at the same time as me secretary of state, but for foreign affairs, and I was external economic affairs. He had played a very important role in what was called *Le salon des Ambassadeurs* in Helsinki. I think it was around 1972 or 1973, to try to make order in what could have become the agreement of the Final Act, and he advanced the idea of putting elements in three different baskets: the more political ones, the more economic ones, and then the cultural and human rights and religious aspects. And he played, with the whole Swiss delegation, a great role in the negotiations in Geneva up to 1<sup>st</sup> of August 1975, when the Final Act was concluded and afterwards in the implementation.

But again you see we were there at the margin of the United Nations, even if finally in an organ of the United Nations, the Economic Commission for Europe. And I found myself there, and it was my first real experience with the procedures of the United Nations, which were very problematic. These horrible delays I could not tolerate at the beginning of the meetings, starting with interpreters who were not agreeing to go on. There were group caucus meetings all the time—negotiations, political negotiations. I don't know how many embassies in Geneva invited me to participate in these negotiations, and always with very few results on a few words. I was much too practical,

coming from a life of trade diplomacy that was more looking at the concrete results than these types of negotiation of language. And I was irritated sometimes. But it was not bad, because perhaps in a rather general way people sometimes felt that I was right and that we should go out from the discussion and try to find solutions.

TGW: Were there any benefits from this group system in Geneva? And I am thinking particularly of new ideas, new approaches, and new initiatives. Did this sort of tedious but confrontational atmosphere put anything on the table that was useful?

CS: Difficult. I think that the neutrals in certain aspects were helping to get out working solutions. One very interesting aspect of the Economic Commission for Europe was that the Yugoslavs were in the western caucus. Yugoslavs, as communists, were everywhere, because they were associated to the COMECON; they were in the Non-Aligned Movement for UNCTAD; they were in the western caucus for the ECE; and they had had an agreement with the European Community and another with EFTA. So they were everywhere.

TGW: Sounds like Switzerland!

CS: Not at all! What Switzerland made was something very much more concrete and direct. I think that this group system was probably needed at a certain time, particularly during the Cold War, but didn't really bring advantages. And I followed particularly the western caucus in ECE, or the Group B in UNCTAD. And I must say that one of the major problems was this confrontation between the European Community and the United States, with the Japanese trying to enter without being very convincing, because nobody understood what they wanted to add. But it was then for the countries of the European Community problematic, because they were controlled by the commission

and they were not able always, in trade issues and in some of the economic issues, to get out and be more free by making politics which were coming from their own government.

I made the comparison with the GATT. It was the GATT of Olivier Long. It was the GATT where he had these “seven plus seven” consultations. Seven were large trading partners and seven in addition. The Swiss were in the “plus seven.” These consultations were called often in his office, with short notice and not always well planned. And this was my tremendous advantage because I had my head of delegation in Bern or the deputy head of the delegation in Bern who were not able to come down to Geneva, and I went myself representing as deputy.

This was the beginning of the 1970s, and I felt this worked much better. Certainly there were a lot of difficulties, but *in camera caritatis*, without being in public view, you had concrete problems put on the table with proposals by the director-general. They were destroyed by one side or the other, but one knew exactly where these major players stood. They had to come out and say why they could not accept that. And how many positive things were made in the GATT through these Olivier Long consultations in the “seven plus seven” group!

Later it was another situation. I worked a lot with my former colleague and great friend, the successor of Olivier Long, Arthur Dunkel. When preparing Punta del Este, I was in a completely different position. I was then secretary of state in Bern. And Punta del Este, not to forget, in 1986 launched the Uruguay Round, before there were long negotiations in Geneva in order to have a platform for negotiations. And finally Switzerland played a major role with Colombia, especially at this time in trade negotiations. I always recall *le café au lait*, because the paper that was presented as the



basis for negotiation in Punta del Este was a Swiss-Colombia paper or a Colombia-Swiss paper, therefore *café au lait*! And what was important was that this paper was unofficially supported by the European Union, but they didn't sign it. The United States and others felt that it could have been a good basis. The Japanese never were against it.

We had a number of countries of the industrialized world and the developing world behind this paper. The greater opposition came from some major advanced developing countries—Brazil, India, Egypt, and two or three others. And finally it was extremely useful, and I think that if Punta del Este was finally successful to launch the Uruguay Round, it was very much because of this document.

And why do I speak now of that? Because the old procedure, with the help of the director-general of GATT or outside the director-general of GATT, was without political or regional groupings. It was, according to the interests, according to the importance of one or another country, a lot of consultations, but not the UNCTAD system, not the ECE system.

TGW: I wonder if we could return to the ECE for a moment. Not quite when you were president, but before Helsinki, to what extent did the ECE provide a useful bridging function between the East and the West? Starting with [Gunnar] Myrdal's day on the statistical side and then on a quite technical, functional side, the commission has a reputation for at least providing a forum where countries of these two systems could get together. Is that true?

CS: Yes. It is true, and I viewed the role of this commission, in economic and technical terms, as very productive. It was the only place to discuss with COMECON countries. The question that remains open is about the data that they were giving: were

they genuine and correct? But certainly it was very, very important. And one has not to forget that through the Economic Commission for Europe during the Cold War, there were a number of agreements concluded that were of tremendous practical importance.

Let us take the so-called TIR (Transport International Routier): agreements on lorries to pass the borders with a certain passport. Let us take the old question of road signals to be unified in the region of the Economic Commission for Europe. I think these are a few examples—you have many more—of practical good work. But this was made in committees of technical experts. As soon as you went higher, politics came into play with so many personalities coming from Eastern Europe, vice ministers of foreign affairs, and not necessary of foreign trade, or foreign economic affairs. And this is the interesting aspect of Switzerland, that always insisted that the head of delegation for the ECE came from the ministry of economy.

I had a title of ambassador, or of minister-plenipotentiary, before but in the ministry of economy. The instructions were given by the minister of economy. We always viewed all of these organizations, that were very political, from the economic advantage to be taken out and approached. So that I would say the time of Myrdal and later then of Stanovnic that I witnessed, even before the Final Act, was something positive.

TGW: During this same period, mainly the 1970s, I would like to try to get at your perception of the utility of a couple of kinds of devices that were utilized to put ideas on the table. And I am thinking here in particular about global conferences: Stockholm (UN Conference on the Human Environment), Rome (World Food Conference) for food; Bucharest (World Population Conference) for population; Mexico

City (UN World Conference of the International Women's Year) for women. This first round of conferences began in the 1970s. We came back to them in the 1990s. But from the point of view of someone working within a government, did these conferences have an impact on policymaking? Did they force officials to look at new issues in new ways?

CS: I would speak as a Swiss and as a Swiss in the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade, but not only foreign trade, but all economic aspects of development cooperation. The regional banks were also in the same ministry—very few. They had an impact, for diplomats, for foreign affairs, first of all because they had to prepare themselves. This was one of the very good things about all kinds of negotiations, the internal work producing machinery. Let us not forget the importance in the ICRC, always very strict from my side. Each talk I would have as president with somebody coming from outside a head of state—a minister, a head of rebels, and so on—I would have to be prepared. And officials had to work in order to take out the history, to take out the points of interest for us, and the points of interest for them. And in all the negotiations you have to try to understand the motivation of the other side and so on.

And in all multilateral affairs, there is a lot of preparatory work to be done. And I would say that this has been something very useful in order to raise the attention, not yet really of public opinion, but of government administrations. I do not think that Switzerland played a major role in these conferences of the 1970s. Certainly there were delegations. I have friends who were heads of the delegations at Mexico for the women's conference and so on, but no real role in my recollection of Switzerland in this type of conferences.

It is completely different later on, in the 1990s, starting with Rio (UN Conference on Environment and Development), Copenhagen (World Summit on Social Development), Beijing (Fourth World Conference on Women), Cairo (International Conference on Population and Development). This was when Switzerland had awakened, when Switzerland was much closer to the United Nations and participated actively. And I think today you see Switzerland is, through the fact that Geneva is here and there is a lot going on here, but also in New York, very present, very present everywhere. And therefore, I tell you frankly, perhaps this is a question that comes out later on. We will in two or three years from now vote again on the United Nations.

And I hope that the atmosphere with the people will be such that it will pass as the government anticipates. It would be a catastrophe if again it will be a “no.” In my view, there is, however, no real problem not to be a member. Because in practical terms, not in political, but practical, we are able to work everywhere. And perhaps we have a position which is even better than the one of a number of member countries. But I’m sorry. I opened parentheses.

TGW: We’re also interested in your perspectives on eminent commissions. You’re now part of one that we’re both involved in. But let’s look back to the 1970s and the 1980s and the commissions that dealt with a number of issues starting with the Pearson Commission, the first look at development in 1969. Fast-forward to the Brundtland Commission on sustainable development, but in between Willy Brandt and others. Do you think that these are helpful in terms of changing international attitudes, views, policies?

CS: I was rather skeptical in the past. Since I have been on the UN Peace Operations Commission last year, I tried to change my mind at the insistence of Kofi Annan because my skepticism would not have brought me to participate in it. But my skepticism is not the one of somebody looking at them from an academic point of view. I think that reading these reports you have a lot of interesting things in them. And you have recommendations which have very limited implementation and some not at all. My largest skepticism comes from, you may recall, a report that came very close to me. At the beginning of 1986 there was a report of the so-called *commission des princes*. It was on humanitarian issues, and it was chaired by [El] Hassan [bin Talal] of Jordan and Sadruddin Aga Khan here in Geneva. And there were a number of eminent persons. I found this report very interesting. But it came to the General Assembly, and they took note. And nothing happened—nothing at all afterwards! I remember I saw Hassan a few months ago in Lisbon, and he told me that he has still this large disappointment for the whole work done without seeing a real follow-up.

And I am now somewhat broken up by it because the so-called Brahimi report (*Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations*), the report on peace operations of the United Nations, despite I have criticized your colleague, the director of this study, for the drafting that was much too complicated in its language. Dr. Bill Durch was also writing too long texts. I always said: “We need texts with sex appeal. People have to understand in the General Assembly—the heads of states, the ministers—if you wish to obtain something. It should not be a study for academics. They will be then full of dust in libraries of universities.” I said that very clearly. I even put it in one of my e-mails. But finally the long work we have done in order to polish the text and put what we really

wanted in the report has made that report not bad at all. There are in certain aspects too many details, but the report, particularly the recommendations, are good.

And I was pleased in the reactions of the Secretary-General first on the answers given and the mentions made in the Security Council and in the Millennium Summit of the General Assembly, a lot of positive comments. I think I never heard or read a negative one. Then there has been a follow-up report by the Secretary-General. Then a working group of the Security Council discussing the recommendations, and they have taken up almost all of our recommendations. Even when we were criticizing the Security Council to change, they hinted, "Yes, they are right. We have to change." And then, the budgetary side, the side linked to the financial requests, the financial needs, has been disappointing. The same countries that had taken very positive approaches then said that a lot of these recommendations are not *réalisables* because of the implications in financial terms.

Well, I think that in the international community, I have observed that during perhaps thirty years of multilateralism, there is a very disappointing aspect. This is the difference of language by the same country according to the level of representation and there you may understand it, even if you cannot accept it, because of internal political reasons. But in the same countries when people of different ministries are speaking, agreements that have been concluded on a very topical issue, in a certain organization, in certain circles, are destroyed in another one by the same that had agreed to it before; representatives of the same country, but no longer the same people because they are coming from another ministry.

And this is one of the major problems. I think in the United Nations you have that also—the difference of language from the General Assembly to specialized institutions or subordinate organs. But I had to fight myself when I had this responsibility in the Swiss administration. The coordination of work inside administrations is one of the most difficult matters, particularly then in a country like Switzerland where you always try to take into account the opinions of people outside the administration. That is to say: political parties, economic circles, trade unions, industries, agriculture, and NGOs. These consultations are extremely cumbersome. But you have to do it; you have to do it in a very serious way if you wish outside to be credible, if you wish to have a line which will be maintained even if you change organizations in which you speak.

TGW: You mentioned that new sacred word, “NGOs.” What’s your sense as to their contribution to the evolution of ideas, norms, and principles in these multilateral contexts?

CS: Well, I should perhaps start by saying that I never saw a very clear definition of what these NGOs were. It is very easy to say that this is any organization which is nongovernmental, but if you look at that from the international point of view, is that an organization which has a certain international, not only activity, but network to be credible and not simply national interest to be represented? I went to Montreal at the conference that took place in December of 1999 of NGOs. It was very interesting, very active. Kofi Annan in the opening made one of the keynotes, and I liked very much to be present among them. But there I discovered this disparity of people present. I think that it is certainly very useful. You know that I have been, and if I am here in this office, it is because of my own landmines engagement. And there—for the Ottawa Convention

(Landmine Ban Convention)—the NGOs have made a lot of work. I think in parallel Jody Williams knows that she has the Nobel Peace Prize, but we could have got it together with the ICRC because we always worked in parallel with a somewhat different language. But I would like to recognize that if we had come to such an agreement, this is the dynamic of NGOs, because NGOs were able to motivate public opinions that had influence on their governments. And we came to what we have. And I must say with a minister as loyal as Lloyd Axworthy of Canada, it was extremely agreeable to work on this matter when Jill Sinclair was the official dealing with us. Because they asked us, the ICRC—that is, not an NGO, but is neither an international agency—worked together with NGOs and we have together also suggested a lot of things to do by the Canadians that have helped to have the dynamics.

This is a wonderful example. I think NGOs have a very important role to play. But one very important aspect they have not to discredit themselves. And this is, I think, a real problem now—the proliferation of such institutions. The lack of transparency of who is supporting them and what is the genuine objective. And then certainly for me, extremely negative, is when they start acting as *casseurs*, as it has been the case in Geneva, in Seattle, in Davos, in Prague, and so on. This is completely unacceptable, and they are discrediting themselves, because finally you have the impression that always in such movements you have persons who are coming from NGOs that you thought would be real partners for a substantial dialogue for making matters advancing in the right direction.

TGW: This is the beginning of tape number two, 11 January 2001, Tom Weiss and Cornelio Sommaruga. I wanted to just continue this NGO discussion for a moment



because the Landmines Convention presents an interesting constellation of NGOs, the ICRC (which is a category by itself), and governments (like-minded or whatever you want to call the governments). In other contexts, the Secretary-General is calling for new kinds of partnerships, for example, the Global Compact involving the private-sector NGOs, intergovernmental organizations. Is this, on balance, a sensible way to proceed?

CS: Well I said to Kofi Annan that his way of preparing the Millennium Summit was something extremely attractive for me because in this Global Compact he tried to have a very serious contact with different groups. Even if this has not brought immediately something to the United Nations, it has certainly served to sensitize the members of these groups to the problems of the world today. And I think it was certainly good to have parliamentarians. I would like to insist on the importance of working with parliamentarians, because the messages in foreign affairs and foreign economic affairs or development affairs between governments and their own parliaments are not good. The messages and the information are not as they should be. Probably because there are very often reasons of internal political character that do maintain the reservations from the side of the government to say too much to parliamentarians in official terms. But I consider what Kofi Annan has initiated with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, to have the presidents, particularly of parliaments, present in New York also to be a very good thing.

And I open a parenthesis. I have pursued as president of the ICRC this policy very much. I've gone to many parliamentarian assemblies to speak to them, and my last very high moment was in Berlin at the opening of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly in 1999, where I had 2,000 people listen to my keynote address just after Chancellor [Gerhard] Schröder. I mean you can say something to these people. You can draw their

attention to problems of the world. You could, as I did, draw their attention to international humanitarian law. And we had worked out at that time with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the ICRC a booklet for parliamentarians. What can parliamentarians do to concretely support international humanitarian law? Why should they do that? And we had that in several languages, and I think it was very good. And then I could go on saying what we have done.

So I would like to say it was, first of all, very good to have the parliamentarians. Secondly, religious leaders, it was not the most successful of the gatherings before the Summit, because of the problem to make the choice for what is a spiritual and religious leader. But I think that the idea to do it was very good. I was invited as president of the Swiss Foundation for Moral Rearmament to Caux, but I was not able to go. I asked one of my colleagues to go there, and I had very interesting reports. But it was again a very good idea because we have seen that also in the so-called Brahimi report the importance of prevention. And prevention is education. And in education, religious and spiritual leaders have a lot to say. And it is very important that one is working in order to avoid that religion is taken as one of the reasons of war, that religion is used for violence. I will say that in a lecture I will be giving in London in ten days time.

But Kofi Annan did a very good thing to have included all the religious people and also a third group, the business world, with both sides of industry, with the International Chamber of Commerce. I think that this was also very good to have the direct dialogue. And to put these people into the General Assembly room means for them to be aware of what is going on. And perhaps when they take the *Financial Times* or the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* next time with a title on the UN, they will read the article

in order to try to understand what is going on, even if we have not solved the political problems. But there were a number of other problems that were discussed. I know from Juan Somavía—he was there and contributed—that a number of aspects of human rights were presented. I don't remember if Kofi Annan did something with universities and scholars, because this is in my view also something that should be done.

We are going a little further from the NGOs. But I think the sensitization of these different worlds of civil society is important and in my view, if we wish to have a better world, education is of paramount importance. It starts in the families and it goes on in the schools. But then, particularly when you go to colleges and universities, it is fundamental. There must be a direct feeling of what is going on in the world. You cannot limit that to those scholars that you are in very specialized institutes. It must mean going through in all faculties, in all the different aspects of life. And it would be important to do it.

NGOs, what is called NGOs, it's good that Kofi Annan is attaching importance to them. He has said it in his Millennium Report (*We the Peoples: The Role of the UN In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*). He has come to Montreal to the conference, I mentioned, and I think it was very good that he did open it. And he has tried to pursue that. There is a very interesting detail in the so-called Brahimi report. This doesn't come from Bill Durch. This is something from the members. It is as we say in the convention, the role of all NGOs is a very important one and the UN should work more with NGOs, as the Secretary-General has said.

And then I was very pleased that we have made an example without mentioning the NGOs, which probably would not like to be called NGO. It is Mozambique. We

mentioned Mozambique in the report on peace operations as one of the situations—it was not prevention because it was peacemaking—where the Comunità di Sant’ Egidio has made these quite extraordinary negotiations by putting RENAMO (Resistencia Nacional Moçambicana/Mozambican National Resistance) and FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique/Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) together. And they have an agreement that has been working, because since then there has not been a civil war in Mozambique—certainly with a lot of help, with the United Nations troops there. And I think this is a very important aspect to have NGOs more used by governments through international organizations. And also leaders of international organizations can help.

It is interesting you started your question making a comparison with the ICRC. I have worked my thirteen years in the ICRC in order to avoid any confusion of the ICRC being considered as an NGO. Certainly there are legal grounds. But there is also an optical question. NGOs are very much outspoken. They make a constant advocacy. NGOs use language that goes extremely far. I didn’t want to be in that club. I preferred as president of the ICRC to go to see a head of state, or a prime minister or a minister of defense, *in camera* to tell him or her what was not going—with insistence.

And once the reports of, I think my seven encounters with [Slobodan] Milo\_evi\_, are read, one will see that I always had a very hard language without coming to the breaking point. But I had little to say outside. I wanted to maintain the possibility to have a dialogue with such people because I needed them in order to reach the victims.

Now let us take for example the human rights commission (UN Commission on Human Rights). Look at what is happening there, or was happening, because lately I am not following it very closely. But in the last eight or nine years, even before the end of

the Cold War, there were fewer active NGOs. What they were saying in many circumstances was said in such a way that it was no longer credible or people no longer wanted to listen to them. And therefore I was very grateful as ICRC not to be described as such. And finally, the insistence within the United Nations to have a special status for the ICRC as observers in the General Assembly was extremely useful. Because immediately afterwards, in all subordinate organs, all the specialized agencies, we said: “Well, now look at that. We would like to change our status in your organization.” And why we did that—it is in order not to be on the same place as NGOs, but to be able to have a more credible discourse without making too much noise, sometimes also if needed, a very harsh discourse.

There is one speech that I made, not in an international organization but this one will pass in history, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of July in 1992, on what was happening in Bosnia-Herzegovina and more precisely in and around Banja Luka. It was a ministerial meeting—probably you have it, I don’t know—a meeting of ministers dealing with refugees convened by Sadako Ogata here in Geneva. And she invited me to make the keynote. And it was the first time that openly one was speaking of the extermination camps. I didn’t accuse anybody. But I had a very harsh language on that. And then there was an American journalist that went there two days afterwards and he filed a report and so on.

But I think the ICRC was able from this position to maintain its credibility while speaking rather openly of serious aspects. Therefore, I said when you began speaking about NGOs, how important it is that NGOs maintain their credibility. And one of the problems is how to categorize the NGOs. Which are the criteria in order to recognize

them? They have their own organizations, where there are assemblies and so on, according to their specialization. But this would probably be one of the problems of the next years to differentiate among them.

TGW: You mentioned some time ago reports gathering dust or books gathering dust. At the same time you mentioned the thought that the Secretary-General should perhaps think about openings to universities. What actually has been, in your view, the contribution of outside academics? Or what could be the contribution of outside academics toward putting new ideas in front of governments? In front of the ICRC? In front of international institutions?

CS: Well, first of all when I was speaking before of academics I was trying to say that it was important in all sectors of the academy, not simply those dealing with international relations, that they are aware of what is going on in the UN. Now to your specific question, which is certainly related to what specialized academic institutions can contribute, I am certainly very positive. There must have been a number of cases where proposals made by universities, institutes in different countries, have influenced *le cours des évènements*. For example, when I was in the ICRC, I listened a lot to three or four academic groups that were particularly interested in going deeper into international humanitarian law or in some aspects of the problematics of the links between public health and war, including weapons matters. There I think a lot of things were coming. We initiated in the ICRC—and I am not satisfied that it is now delayed—a very important study on international humanitarian customary law. What is in my view essential in this field is to close the gap existing because some states, some major states, have not ratified the additional protocols. It would be very important to bring out what is

already customary law of what is in these protocols. The Americans have taken up some of these provisions in their own military handbooks.

How can you do such a study without any academics? It cost the ICRC enormously, but I was very much in favor. We took academics from all parts of the world, assembling them in Geneva, going back, making studies, bringing and going, without making much noise. But the study should have been coming out last year at Easter. Now they are very much delayed. I am sorry, but this is an example of how important it is that there would be this contribution by academics. And I think we should favor that. But academics have also to understand that *l'art pour l'art* may be of interest for them but not necessarily for governments and for organizations. They have to think sometimes in more practical terms.

TGW: You mentioned when you were a child during the 1940s and going back to Switzerland, you had encountered refugees and human suffering from war. But actually your professional life, until you went to the ICRC, was in very different sectors. What was it like to move squarely into the humanitarian arena? How were you selected to become the president of the ICRC?

CS: Well, first of all I must speak about myself. I had a religious Catholic education and was a member of the Boy Scouts. I had a number of activities besides my studies, in fields of charities, but also operational assistance, going to see people, helping the elderly. I had a Red Cross example from the family in two generations, the generation of my father, and I saw that on the wall of our house, but I did not have contact with them because it was the grandmother of my father, very much involved during the First World War in Switzerland with questions of prisoners of war. At that

time there were a number of prisoners of war interned in Switzerland, particularly from Austria. And then my mother was a nurse, a nurse in the Italian Red Cross, and she very much participated in the organization of pilgrimages to Lourdes with ill persons in trains. And all that I saw. I even went with her as *brancardier*. So that the question of social work, the question of human suffering, was certainly a reality for me. And I also remember that very often in my first real diplomatic bilateral, and later on more bilateral and multilateral economic activity, I often asked myself: “Where are the human beings behind this? What is the social benefit of that and that agreement for the population? Is the advantage exclusively an advantage for one side of the population? Or can, through the reaching of a certain agreement, the population of the other side also take advantage?” And certainly this was one of the major, I would say, problems of ethics, when negotiating with communist countries of the COMECON. Because you didn’t see very well what was behind, how it got through the preparation.

And certainly as state secretary for three years, I was in charge of what was called first, the *Division du commerce* and later on the *Office fédéral des affaires économiques extérieures*. I was much more confronted with development problems. First of all because of the responsibilities I had with the OECD, so that the Swiss relations to the DAC (Development Assistance Committee) were also under me. Then the three regional development banks, where we were a member at that time: the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). I also was an observer, the only country to have observer status, in the Development Committee of the World Bank and IMF, and I attended several meetings. I did sign some agreements with the then-president of the World Bank



on financing and refinancing of IDA (International Development Association). And certainly there you were confronted very much with what was behind.

But I never expected to change my job. I can say that finally in the whole of my professional life I never thought to make any kind of career leap. I tried to fulfill my tasks, to fulfill them as correctly as possible. I even tried to learn something outside in order to be able to cope with what was asked of me. There is an amusing story. I didn't want at all to become a secretary of state. And when the government first asked me I refused, saying: "You have a lot of better people. Take me out of the list of candidates." Because I am well aware of the Peter's Principle. I think that there are so many situations where the promotion brings you to full catastrophe.

Finally, the government insisted that I became the secretary of state, or state secretary. In French it is *Secrétaire d'état*. In German it is *Staatsekretär*. And then I had to make a tremendous effort because I was a specialist on Europe in the wider sense of the word—market economies, planned economies, all these things, multilateral, bilateral, but to a large extent it took a lot of energy and efforts. I traveled a lot in order to be in developing countries, to be in newly industrialized countries.

Then I had also one of the aspects that can be put in relations with development that was very important. It is export-credit insurance. And we had a situation of tremendous deficit with this insurance. I had to deal with that. I had some very delicate matters to discuss in this respect, when there was financing through the export-credit insurance of controversial projects, for example, because of environmental issues. I always remember a situation somewhere in Sumatra, when there was an industry wishing

to be there constructing a power station. And there were larger disagreements but also question marks as to the environmental consequences of such a big power station.

I negotiated with Mr. Turkut Oezal when he was the state secretary for planning in Turkey. The financing of this credit risk—it's not a real financing but indirectly a financing because the banks were involved—the famous hydro-electrical system of Turkey, which was then very much attacked by Iraq and Syria, that was called an Ataturk project.

These were actually very complex problems. They brought me into contact with the developing world. My task was to advise the government to make decisions in matters that were more on the economic side. But I had to look at the consequences, and I must say that these decisions were not easy. In thirty years, when the Swiss Federal Archives will be opened, one would probably find some notes signed by Sommaruga to the government saying that I was not at all in agreement with a decision that they were about to take. And they took them. This also concerned some exports of weapons. All of that were delicate matters.

As to the ICRC, I could certainly tell you the whole history. I have said it several times. One evening, the telephone rang and a rather good acquaintance of mine was on the telephone and said, "Sit down." I said, "Well I am sitting, what happened?" And he said, "Well I am calling you from Geneva." And I asked: "What are you doing in Geneva?" because he was not at all a Genevese. "But I am a member of the ICRC," he answered. "Well I didn't know that." "I have to tell you, we are searching for a new president and we have discussed all day about you becoming the new president of the ICRC." Then I said, "You are completely foolish, *Vous êtes tous fous*. I am very glad

where I am, particularly now that I have made the effort in order to cope with my new tasks.”

My wife and me had just moved to Bern. Before we lived in Fribourg for many years because of the children and the French-speaking schools. And I said “*Ça n’entre pas en ligne de compte.*” “You can’t answer in this way. Why are you saying that? You can’t. You have to study that. You have a month’s time to reflect, but it is completely secret.” Well, then I didn’t really know much about the ICRC. I remembered something at the time about the Geneva Conventions that I studied during my law studies. But the practical activities of the ICRC I didn’t really know. I knew better what the national Red Cross were doing because of my parents. None of our children were living with us because they were all in universities or even some had already finished university. I said to my wife, “Try to get them here in one of the next weekends, because I am sure they know much more than me.” Then I said to my wife: “Help me. If I go in a shop in Bern, everybody recognizes me. You are not recognized. If you could find a book on the ICRC, bring it home!” Because it was secret, I didn’t want to create any curiosity.

And I was able to read something even in one journal, and then my six children were there. Some already had partners. And there was a long discussion. And it was very interesting because indeed they knew more about the ICRC than me. Three were studying in Geneva. Others have had *copains* that had spoken about the ICRC or had elderly sisters or brothers that had been in the ICRC.

And finally the advice was, if I include my wife, six to one. There was only one of my sons. He didn’t speak against, but he said: “Are you sure you wish to leave what you are doing now?” He was the only one understanding something of what I was doing.

He had almost finished his studies of economy at St. Gallen and he was following what dad was doing and was reading my speeches. The others were not interested at all. And each one did bring an interesting contribution in our discussion and certainly this social ethical element was relevant. And then I said to these persons or to the person who was calling, "If you really wish to pursue, there may be a chance that I will say yes if you ask." But I didn't immediately say "yes."

And it was two or three months later. Suddenly there had been rumors in one or the other newspapers. But it was amusing that there was always more than one name. Particularly, *Le Journal de Genève* was mentioning my name saying: "*Si ça devait être Sommaruga, c'est celui qui a le moins de chance, parce qu'il ne connaît pas la scène Genevoise, ni l'humanitaire. C'est un homme de l'économie...*" or something of that kind.

How is it going? Who is choosing the president of the ICRC? And this is very interesting, I believe, to understand. You have not to forget that the ICRC, legally, is an association of twenty-five Swiss citizens who are renewed by *cooptation*. That is to say that they decide who will be in the committee. And this is a very old tradition in order to avoid interference from outside. But certainly the ICRC has made a number of mistakes in the past because it has created interference by itself. For example, during the Second World War by coopting Swiss ministers who were in charge. But it was not from the government that it was pushed. It was a decision by the ICRC.

And I think you will find this interesting to know. When I came to the ICRC, I felt that the rules were not very clearly defined as to principles or criteria for the choice of the members of the ICRC. And I said, "Let us try to put it on paper." And indeed we made an exercise. We had rules on paper with three lists of criteria, positive ones, for

example, the humanitarian motivation or the knowledge of the world. The negative ones, incompatibilities, for example, political activities, being a priest or a pastor, belonging to certain boards of directors or firms that are dealing with weapons and so on. And third, there should be criteria on the equilibrium in the committee. We should have a certain number of women and not all the professions being medical doctors and lawyers, but also others—different ages and so on. And this worked rather well, because these criterias then always came up.

What is the procedure? The procedure is incredibly anachronistic, but still, it is existing. Who has the right to propose? One of the members of the twenty-five of the committee or one of the directors. As soon as the proposal is made, it becomes secret. One should not speak anymore about that. The second phase—there is a commission of seven members of the committee elected for four years that is scrutinizing the candidatures according to these criteria I mentioned before. And if there is room, they will then propose to the plenary the one or the other name. Then comes the third phase, there is a discussion, and a secret meeting of the committee, with a first secret vote cast called *le scrutin préliminaire*, where you must have an absolute majority in order to pass. And then if the absolute majority is there, one can pass, but in another meeting, that means at least six weeks later to the fourth step, the *scrutin principal*. It is again secret, but this time with a two-third majority vote. However, as the committee has already discussed, if one is absent, he can then in this *scrutin principal* vote by correspondence, by secret ballot. If in this fourth step, the person is elected, then remains the fifth step that the president has to deal with, and that is to contact the person, who in principle should know nothing, and to tell this person: “You have been elected as a member of the

ICRC. Are you ready to accept? But if you accept, you can't do that, that, that, that, and that. It's a voluntary job." And then if he says: "Well I'm enthusiastic. I accept." I can ask, "When are you able to come to start?"

Now, I go back to the president, because this was your question if I understood you correctly. And the president is simply one of the members of this committee that has been elected, as all others for four years. And after four years you have to renew the election, and there comes after the second term, the third term, you have to have three-quarters majority in the secret ballot. And there is a further clear rule that at seventy you have to disappear. This goes for the president as for the other members. And the president will be elected by the same committee with a second-ballot vote, where he needs two-thirds majority to be the president of the ICRC.

The president of the ICRC, for the time being, is a full-time president. And one of the vice presidents is also full-time. But the other members are *bénévoles*—volunteers. They are coming and certainly they have to invest 30 to 40 percent of their time because they are in commissions. There is then an executive council, and so on. I wish not to enter into details. And so it was with me. I was not a candidate but they elected me. So I then learned that there was another, and he was a real candidate because he wanted to be president. But he was not elected. I had—I don't know the details because I never went to the archives to look at that—I had had more than two-thirds of the votes.

TGW: Sounds as if the Vatican has nothing on the ICRC.

CS: It's interesting that you make this comparison. Some journalists sometimes have made it. I could tell you that I was re-elected twice, because I made three mandates.

And at the election of the second term, very exceptionally the vice president, who was chairing when I was called back, said, “They have decided to make also something not foreseen by the rules, to give you the result of the election.” And this was unanimous. They had decided to do that in order to give me a certain push. I think that it must have been unanimous at my third mandate, but they didn’t tell me anything. No, it was not always so easy. I had several cases of candidate members that at the second ballot were not elected because they had not the qualified majority. And people, even if it was a small circle, do not say all of what they think. But they vote; they say, “no.”

And this explains why there is this rule of secrecy, because the negative vote could discredit somewhat the personality. And there is a famous story of a Swiss ex-minister whom some people wanted to have in the ICRC and who was informed that there was this procedure. And finally he—it was before my time—he didn’t get this majority and this was something for him very negative, and he was a very sensitive person. And it did affect him.

TGW: What’s actually the relationship between the ICRC’s operational activities, on the one hand, and its monitoring and advocacy activities for international humanitarian law on the other hand? Political scientists would say that when ideas are imbedded in institutions the way that the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols are in the ICRC, this is a sign that ideas are taken seriously. But you obviously can’t just advocate for ideas, you would also like to provide assistance. What’s the balance between them? And why do you do both?

CS: Well, there was an expression coined by a former director-general of the ICRC who is now a member of the committee, Jacques Moreillon. It was, “*La tension*

*dialectique permanente du CICR.*” It’s a standing tension. It’s a standing dialectic inside the ICRC. We wish to advocate humanitarian international law, but how far can we go without disturbing the operational activities? Because—and it’s becoming always worse in my view—operational activities are very sensitive to reactions of governments or opposition movements because of the media. And if you make advocacy, whenever you make advocacy, this always quickly contributes to change public opinion of the world.

Today global communications, through television, through radio, through the internet, are such that there is almost no time and space between something that is said publicly and the knowledge of people everywhere. And this can have very negative consequences for the attitudes of governments, for the attitudes of opposition movements, but also for the public population. I give you an example. This was one of the most difficult moments during my ICRC presidency, when we lost in one night at three o’clock in the morning, six of our nurses in Chechnya who were killed when they were sleeping. And I don’t pursue the question of the killing, but certainly this was mentioned everywhere by the press. The next day, one of our delegates had difficulties in Kivu in Zaire. And one of the rebels came with his machine gun and when our delegate was insisting on something—I don’t remember what it was—he said, “Would you like that the same thing happens to you as it was in Chechnya to your friends?” This may be a detail, but it shows how matters are going quickly.

But my policy has been never to stop the work of the ICRC in both the implementation of existing international humanitarian law and on the search for deepening this law. The implementation brings with it the judgement without becoming



judges, but the appraisal if it is implemented or not. And we have always taken the position, despite a certain fight internally, that one would have to speak very clearly to responsible people about what was wrong. But this was not necessarily in front of the press. And I had a number of such situations with very unpleasant talks with heads of states, with prime ministers, and with generals.

And one of the most difficult was in Israel, because Israel is a party to the Geneva Conventions and clearly didn't respect a number of provisions of the conventions. For example, the question of the settlements: settlements are forbidden by the Geneva Conventions, because it is said that you cannot transfer the population of the occupying power to the occupied territories. But there were other problems. The way of treating prisoners and so on. And we tried always to give information to the Israelis in writing, by verbal notes, by contacts at medium level, very often without any response.

Therefore, in my time, I think I made four or five trips to Israel. And each time, I talked to the prime minister. And I spoke very clearly to the prime minister. Without any intention to speak necessarily to the press. But Israel is such a country that if you say something to a minister, everything is coming out. Even once I made at a lunch a serious remark to the Israeli ambassador in Geneva. Three days afterwards my words were in the *Jerusalem Post*. How he recorded that, how he did it, I don't know. He made a report and then the report went out. And we were two or a maximum of three at this table. So it's a difficult thing, but it should not prevent one to say what has to be said in order to reach the implementation of the agreements.

But indeed the operational people were always scared, particularly of this president: "Because he is too outspoken, he is going too much in this direction." And

my legal people were always very attentive to see that if I said something, I would find the right legal augmentation and not being too much improvising. And this was an interesting exercise. I was in the middle always. But the ICRC may perhaps change a little of its attitude. It depends on the character of the president.

And then there are other aspects. I must tell you frankly the ICRC is always more dependent on financing by a few major western countries. Switzerland, the U.S. and the United Kingdom are tremendously generous. I tried to pay attention very much that the United States would not reach to 25 percent of our full financing, because I thought this was a limit not to pass in order not to endanger the independence. But it has now been passed, despite the polemic by the American Red Cross against the ICRC because of the emblem. The UK is also generous. This we have built up with Claire Short. The French are very low in the financing of the ICRC, and the Japanese have been quite good, but they are not always reliable for continuity.

You may feel that in the landmine issue, it would have been possibly the same problem. I disregarded it, and I had a very difficult situation at that time. Because I had my operational people saying, "Pay attention. Don't go too far in advocacy." I had our medical personnel who said, "Please, Mr. President! Do something. We are cutting legs everyday. It's terrible in this way." And then my lawyers said, "Well, pay attention. You cannot go further than that." Then our financial people said, "Pay attention. There are some important governments that would certainly not like that." They have presented me the position for a press conference, one day and a half before the conference. And I said, "Well thank you for all these arguments. I will write the introduction of the press conference myself."

There is a book that just came out, where all the statements are in it, for the landmines, also the one of this press conference. I finally made my statement, after having decided that we could not do anything else then, to ask for the total ban. And I went with the total ban.

Today, the ICRC has made a study on the unexploded remnants of war, particularly what happened in Kosovo with the cluster bombs. Despite difficulties inside the ICRC, the institution did propose, in the preparatory committee of the CCW revision conference, the Conventional Weapons Convention, to have a new protocol on these unexploded remnants of war where there would be a number of provisions to limit the possibility to utilize cluster bombs. Coming back to the question of advocacy, I should say that if there would not have been the problem of exposing the human lives of our delegates to possible reactions, I would have been much more active in this field. But it was important to do it, and the committee never—How do you say that? *Désavouer*?

TGW: Denied.

CS: Denied what I was doing. Because, for example, in the question of the total ban on anti-personal mines, I should have asked the committee, but there was no meeting, and I did not want to postpone the press conference. I didn't want to make a telephone consultation. I decided myself and I went on. And afterwards, there have been several members saying, "He has really gone much too far as to the proceedings foreseen by the rules of procedure. But he was right."

TGW: Some people argue that the most important idea in terms of changes and impacts has been human rights, in the last fifty years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, although there obviously were traces of it before. How would you

characterize changes in approaches toward human rights and attitudes about human rights in the last half century?

CS: Well, there has been a growing awareness of human rights being not simply an idealistic and philosophical aspect of life but a very clear legal constraint for those countries—members of the international community, members of the United Nations. And I think that there has been an increasing awareness and interest of public opinion and through public opinion on the governments during all of these fifty years, but particularly I would say in the last perhaps fifteen years. Just before and after the end of the Cold War. And after the end of the Cold War, there has been also more courage, I believe, to speak out by governments on a number of problems.

I finally think that between the awareness of human rights to be protected and the proceedings that the international community has at its disposal, there is a great gap. And the politicization of the human rights commission is something that really creates for me a number of questions. And I must say that I am preoccupied in our ICISS (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty), we will come to speak about reasons that could justify intervention, that it will be very difficult to find objective criteria avoiding these political considerations. I have witnessed often these votes, these negotiations, and what was going on around the commission on compromises, on resolutions, losing very much the context of the problems of human beings in difficulty in the field.

But certainly public opinion has brought, through NGOs possibly, a real change in the sense—and I said that before being now at this commission—that the sacrosanct sovereignty of states is no more what it was up to ten years ago. What has happened with

the ad hoc tribunals for Rwanda and Yugoslavia? What is happening with the implementation of the Statutes of Rome for the International Criminal Court (ICC)? The courage of a judge to incriminate a former head of state, the fact that a head of state had been indicted, and many other things bring you to see that there is something happening in this field which is very positive.

Where I am much more skeptical is when you speak about intervention. And you join the intervention with the adjective “humanitarian,” and you say, “Because of human rights we have to intervene.” I think that there, well I said it before, there is a tremendous ambiguity of views, perhaps more with the term “humanitarian” than “human rights,” because it is very popular. When you speak about “humanitarian” everybody will say: “Ah, certainly something that has to be done.” And when you go in internal politics and you say, “Well I had to intervene on humanitarian grounds,” nobody will say something against it because it is humanitarian.

But in my view, it is something else. What the international community has to do is to see that law and order are applied. And possibly contest certain practices, but to ensure that certain basic legal rules are introduced in certain countries that are not giving an individual the possibility of defending his own human rights. I think what the European Court of Human Rights is doing is something very interesting, because the individual who seems to be affected after having passed the whole judicial system of the countries can go to the court now and say something is wrong in relation to the European Human Rights Convention. And the independent court will judge. It will not necessarily condemn the state. But it will say to the state: “Please handle differently your citizen and correct your law.” I think this is an interesting system. But if you take the universal

system of the United Nations, you are not so far. You are in a political forum surrounding the Commission on Human Rights with all sorts of reports coming up from independent or non-independent people. And then votes, votes cast by whom? By governments, again, and this brings us back to politics.

But coming back to what I was saying before about intervention, I think that the question of law and order in the countries should be the center of the attention of our ICISS and the center of the attention of the international community now. This is crucial. Not to allow that law and order would be completely disregarded in different countries. Then one has to intervene. It will be in the interests of human beings certainly because they are the beneficiaries of human rights. But simply to intervene in order to allow some humanitarian help, assistance, I think is the wrong way of doing it. One has to go to the root cause.

TGW: I wonder whether you could generalize on the basis of your years in both observing and participating in UN activities and conferences and then with the ICRC, where you had a number of relationships and programs and projects with agencies. To what extent could you generalize about the quality of leadership and the quality of the officials who worked for the United Nations in comparison with private organizations or businesses or universities? And to what extent there was an excessive concern with organizational turf as a motivating factor?

CS: Well I was glad in all these years to meet a number of personalities in the United Nations who impressed me for their sense of leadership, for their motivation, for their profound honesty. But I must clearly say that this is not my impression of all those I have met. Too many weak personalities, too many personalities completely dependent on

their own governments, too many personalities looking to their own personal career ambitions. And then certainly this tremendous insistence to defend mandates inside a “family” which is the United Nations, where sometimes the independence of the agency or the institution was taken as an argument in order not to be compelled to do something or to do something that they wanted to do. And then, on the other side, in certain instances, having the interference of the political and organizational institutions, the Security Council, the Secretary-General, inside all of that. This was a tremendous ambiguity. And I must say I resisted it very much in order not to enter in such a situation with the ICRC. I always refused to go officially to the Security Council even if I was invited several times.

And the only one that got me to go in front of the Security Council in an official meeting was Lloyd Axworthy, when he was chairing in February 1999 the Security Council himself, on the question of the civilians in war. And then I went myself and made a statement, and I answered during more than one hour, the questions of the members of the Security Council. But, my observation was also an insider’s observation because Boutros Boutros-Ghali created—well it was still under Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, but it didn’t function really—this committee for the coordination of humanitarian tasks led by OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance), by the United Nations humanitarian coordinator. And I must say, I think I went there only two times. The first one was in order to assure myself that the position that was offered to the ICRC would be one of full presence, not as a member but as an invited participant, because I didn’t want that the ICRC would take the responsibility of any decision taken there. But I was interested in participating in a sort of early warning that was done there as well as

in the *répartition* of the tasks among the different persons and institutions. And the second time I don't remember which specific items were in discussion, but I insisted very much that I would go personally. Afterwards I left it more to our director of operations in the ICRC because I thought that he was more of an executive than I was and was able to make decisions.

But why do I tell you all that? It is that I have observed, although only from the outside. I saw all the reports. I saw my people coming back from these meetings in New York and in Geneva. *C'était une lutte de baronies*, among these leaders of the more humanitarian organizations. It was then interesting because Japan was at a certain time very present and the Americans were on the other side. Japan with Akashi, he was the president there, and there was Nakajima that was the WHO's (World Health Organization) director-general. And then Sadako Ogata, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). On the other hand, the Americans with Catherine Bertini of the WFP (World Food Programme), Carol Bellamy of UNICEF, and Gus Speth of the UNDP (UN Development Programme). But you know it is not a question of nationality. Everybody was fighting for his own mandates. And they were all part of the same family! And sometimes they were together in complaining against the Secretary-General, particularly Boutros-Ghali, because they were compelled to follow his instructions.

I always insisted on being more practical and on knowing exactly what was going on in the field, trying to find the best synergies in order to be successful. But we never gave up our responsibilities to protect people, because international humanitarian law was giving us this possibility. And the *sensibilité* on this question of protection was only in the UNCHR with Sadako Ogata. The others didn't know quite what it was.



I preferred to follow another way. Seeing that it was as difficult, I developed my own bilateral relations with all these organizations, starting with the Secretary-General. I must say that I always had excellent contacts. All the Secretaries-General came to the ICRC on official visits, and I visited them regularly in New York and saw them here in Geneva or elsewhere. It was really a relationship of confidence and friendship. Some even came home to dinner or lunch here in Geneva. And then I introduced with UNHCR, UNICEF (UN Children's Fund), World Food Programme—we made it once with UNDP—yearly informal structured dialogues for one or two days. When I say structured it means to have a good prepared *ordre du jour*—informal in the sense that there was no formal summary record taken. At high level with UNHCR, with Sadako Ogata.

With Catherine Bertini it also went very, very well. We had a lot to do with the WFP. We also started with the World Bank. It was important to discuss problems openly. And try to have also an underlining of the differences between institutions. But then to pass a message to our people in the field of both organizations, that we wish the relation to be good. But this multilateral gathering in this organization of coordination, the Interagency Standing Committee was somewhat more problematic.

And then I must tell you again about bureaucratization, because this was at the top. They created a working party of the deputies of the executives of these humanitarian organizations, and then this working party set up a number of task forces. Suddenly you had a new organization that was created, with a lot of paper and very few decisions. And this was negative. I said it to my friend, Sergio Vieira de Mello, "Try to change something." But he did not have much time. Now he is out.

TGW: How are you enjoying retirement?

CS: Well, it is a good question. I am freer to speak of the past. I think you could not have made this interview when I was in the ICRC, even if I gave you the booklet of Massimo Lorenzi that made a number of such interviews. I am very glad that I have some interesting activities. Sometimes difficult to cope with the dates, because these are somewhat different activities, but they are always going from the humanitarian/social to the financial/economic for different reasons. Because you cannot realize in the social field, in the humanitarian field, anything if you have not certain finance. But on the other hand, you have always to influence business, to take into account the present problems of the world.

And I have started already for three years to speak with a slogan, “globalizing responsibilities.” We are globalizing everything. Globalization is a phenomenon which is going on independently from organizations. Are we thinking about these global responsibilities? Yesterday, I finished the text of a speech I will make in London next week where I will speak about that. And I try to make a link between this globalizing responsibility as a peace and security aspect.

Now in this office, you have ethical preoccupation. I have indeed accepted to be the president of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, where we are today. I’m very happy to have here my office and to see everyday colleagues concerned with the consequences of landmines. They are executives and are coming, asking for advice. And I have a council of the foundation which is composed mostly by ambassadors, disarmament ambassadors in Geneva, and this is interesting to keep the contact with them. Some countries such as the United States, France, and Austria are sending their high officials here. The United States is particularly interesting because

they participate in the center, while not being a party to the Ottawa Convention.

Secondly, I am in the George Soros network. He has asked me to enter there. I am the chairman of the board of his Swiss foundation, the Karl Popper Foundation—a nice name! And I am a member—and this is more important, I think—of the Open Society Institute board in Budapest, where we follow the activities of all these foundations working in the countries of the former Soviet Union of Central and Eastern Europe and of the former Yugoslavia. And I am also a member of his small group of international advisors. I think we are seven. Tomorrow I am returning to New York for only forty-eight hours, for a meeting with these people. You certainly know most of them because they are coming from universities. And one of our colleagues is there, the colleague of the ICISS, the journalist, Michael Ignatieff. It's an interesting group.

And then the third aspect of my present work where many people do not understand why I have taken it up. This gives me a lot to do, because this is all volunteer work. We have no money. I am the chairman of the board of the Foundation for Moral Rearmament. This is a foundation that has been created already around sixty years ago by an American pastor. And they own in Caux a center of international encounters and conferences. And practically in all of the activities they are trying to bring ethical values to change societies—first of all to change yourself and then to change others.

It had a rather Protestant beginning. It's now completely inter-religious and lay. And it has a network, an incredible network around the world. You have around eighty countries where you have groups of the Moral Rearmament. In America they are quite strong. I am very committed, and we are organizing now the conferences of this summer, and we will have an agenda for reconciliation where we will speak also about problems

related to weapons, to corruption, and in general of good governance. We have in addition a conference also, "Agenda for Reconciliation," where we will concentrate on difficult spots in the world with people who are coming from there.

Last year, we had in August, 500 people in a our "Mountain House" participating in the community life. Guests were coming and going, people from sixty-five countries. Among other regional origins, and this is the interesting aspect, we had people from Bougainville and Papua New Guinea, among them the former head of the rebels and the minister, former prime minister, in charge of Bougainville affairs in the Papua New Guinean government, who discussed for long hours. And then in public, they persecuted the results of their deliberations, without pushing it to the press, without wishing to conclude a statement and signature.

We will have other items. There is a Caux conference for business and industry, where we are trying to confront ethical values in East and West in business. There is a Caux communication forum. This is indeed an activity that occupies me very much, and where my previous experience and also my networking of people brings me to be rather active.

I am chairing the board of directors of an American bank in Geneva, J.P. Morgan Suisse. This is interesting for me also because I am then invited to the J.P. Morgan International Council that assembles a number of personalities of the economic life of the world. And the chairman is George Schulz. You have this certain number, perhaps one-quarter, of top directors of J.P. Morgan, and certainly they discuss, for me difficult aspects of economic and financial relations, also rather technical aspects as the importance of electronics in banking. In addition, they deal with very interesting

elements of world security and security for the United States. The last two meetings, in 2000, they discussed very much American politics, e.g., the presidential election. I had the pleasure to sit close to Professor Condolezza Rice, who was there. I was not necessarily of the same opinion as she was. Interesting to note that we discussed half a day about water, water and the problems of water in the world. You see that it is appropriate to bring in experiences, humanitarian aspects, the preventive aspects in war, and so on.

These are my four presidencies. Then I am a member of the Foundation Council of the *Institut universitaire de hautes études internationales* in Geneva. This is important because we wish to improve the quality of the faculty in particular. I am a member of another foundation this time of the Crédit Suisse. And finally, I have created with some friends a foundation that recalls one of our colleagues of the ICRC who was killed in Sarajevo. With all that I thought I would have enough to do in retirement. And then the message of Kofi Annan came insisting, telling me, “You have to be a member of the panel on UN peace operations.” And I finally said, “yes.” And when I finished with that, I was happy to give some lectures and press conferences about that. They are still asking me about the so-called Brahimi report. Yesterday, for example, the UK ambassador called me and said he wanted to have my advice on how to interpret it.

After all that, came Lloyd Axworthy with his new commission. And I must tell you, my dear friend Tom, that I have really enough. You know, my wife says that she sees me less than when I was with the ICRC, and she feels that I am working in the evening much later at my desk at home than I was doing for the ICRC. What is rather astonishing because everyone was saying and my wife concurred, “You cannot go on

working so much for the ICRC!” Now you asked me if I am enjoying my retirement. I would say yes, I am enjoying my “retirement” because I think I have something to contribute to society; but please don’t use the term “retirement.”

TGW: Is there some question you wished that I had asked you?

CS: Certainly not, you have been complete. And I have given some answers. I would say that we didn’t speak too much about the United Nations because I don’t know enough, but I would like to say that the work in the so-called Brahimi panel has brought me more inside information. And I think that there is a real coordination problem inside the secretariat. Also there you have the bargaining and the political influences. I hope very much, but I know that he will not become particularly popular with that, that the Secretary-General would be extremely attentive in always choosing the best people for the leadership posts. We have, even in the peace operations report, in the conclusions, had a rather tough wording, saying that the United Nations had to introduce a serious system of—we have taken the technical term of *meritocratie*—of promoting people only on the basis of their merits. And this seems to me to be a major problem within the United Nations.

I understand that this may be linked a lot with the contingencies that have to be met for all sorts of countries. But certainly you have good people everywhere. It is not a question of the color of their skin, of their language, or race. If these good people can be helped to have the right education, and this is more increasingly the case—what we are doing with the Soros Foundation in the Central European University—should allow the Secretary-General, perhaps advised by some circle of independent people, to make the

right choices for key positions and not to be always under the political pressure and under the need to have this equilibrium of nationalities.

And I must say that I was rather pleased in the last time with some of the decisions of Kofi Annan that were completely unexpected. Particularly one, I give that as an example, the UNHCR. Many of my friends or good acquaintances would have liked to have this post. And finally former prime minister [Ruud] Lubbers was appointed. I know him. I am convinced that he will do a good job. But there it was typical, this was a choice made by the Secretary-General not necessarily taking into account the pressures he had from several quarters. I hope that this is going on. These internal aspects of the United Nations I did appraise a little late in my professional work. I am very keen to follow and to help if possible. I think it is very important.

This is also the reason why—you may feel that this is ridiculous—but I did it in October of last year. It was two months after the presentation of the Brahimi report and the discussion at the summits. I was in New York and organized a first encounter under my Moral Rearmament hat. We have a small office there. Well, better, our American friends have a small office in New York. But I myself invited—I had to learn everything in the *traitement de texte* in order to make my letters and so on, but I made it—I invited twenty personalities up to the level of Louise Fréchette, and I had twelve from the United Nations, to attend a working luncheon with some of my younger colleagues, to speak about conflict prevention through education on ethical principles.

And I had the pleasure to have four under-secretaries general, the *chef de cabinet* of the Secretary-General, there. George Soros came to the UN building, and it must not be often that he goes there. I also invited one ambassador, the Swiss ambassador.

Among those present was Rabbi Arthur Schneier of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation and some other motivated people. Also the man that had organized the summit of spiritual leaders, Bawa Jain. I don't know if you met him. I made an introduction and the discussion went on and on. I never witnessed a luncheon in the United Nations headquarters lasting so long. I insisted on the UN delegates' restaurant, because if you wish to get the people of the Secretariat, you have to go there. The menu was not bad! There was good wine, but it was a lunch. We started at one o'clock. At quarter past three, we were still discussing. I have never seen such a thing. They were interested. I hope that there is now a certain follow-up. Because the idea was again to concentrate on NGOs, and I wished to discuss with them to see what we can do to help peace operation of the UN.

Well, I wish to be engaged. I don't know how long I may continue to live, but I am not the man who will be sitting and reading books the whole day or watching television every evening; neither I will be the man who will write memoirs. I am speaking already too much, but I think that I am not the type to write. And then it is also very delicate in respect for my previous functions to come out with too many things.

TGW: Well that's why we have had a great pleasure in recording at least some of your wisdom. Thank you very much.

CS: Thank you.



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