

# SWISS-AZERBAIJANI RELATIONS IN EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

*Continuation. See the beginning in IRS-Heritage, № 41, 42*

## **R**ole of the Caucasus in the Swiss economy and foreign policy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

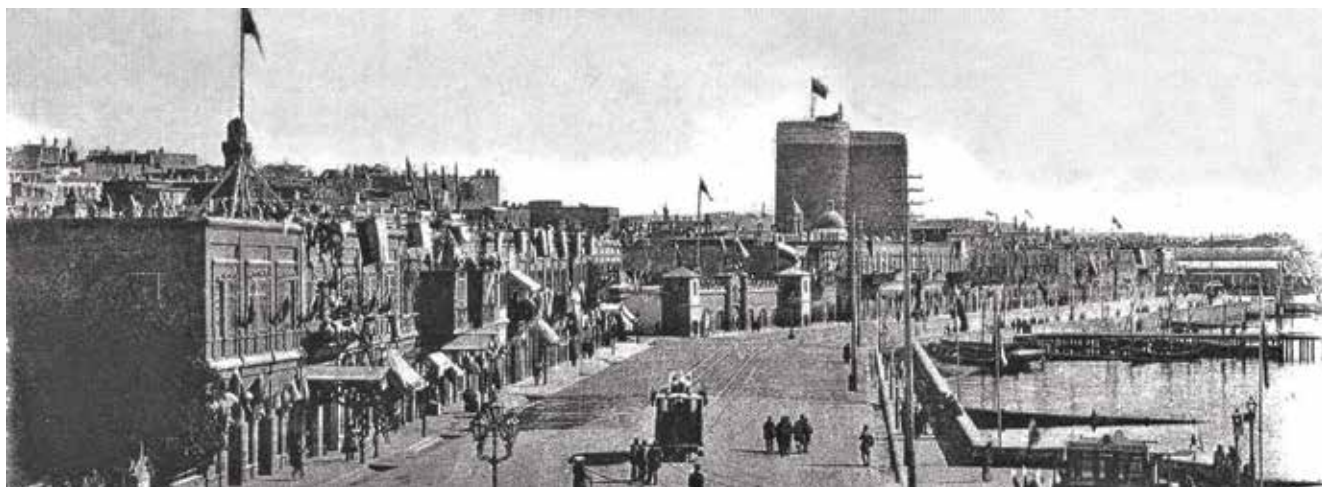
Some of the Swiss people had also moved to the Caucasus region in search of more favorable jobs. It is interesting that in an announcement placed by Baron von Kutzschenbach in Bern Agriculture newspaper (Bernischen Blätter für Landwirtschaft) in 1862, vacancies were announced for specialists at an enterprise and guards at a farm operating in the Caucasus region. The announcement was a turning point in the relocation of Bern peasants to the Caucasus (1).

In 1858, the first cheese factory was established by the Swiss in the Caucasus. By 1900, the number of these enterprises had grown to 15, and in 1914 – to 45. The largest cheese factories were located in the village of Kamarli (currently in Gazakh District).

The resettlement of the Swiss to the Caucasus was one of the factors that required the opening of a consulate in the region. For this reason, the Swiss Federal Council decided to open a consulate in Tiflis in 1883. The following Swiss diplomats worked at the consulate in Tiflis in 1883-1922 (2):

- Honorary Consul Emille Tallichet (28 November 1883 – 5 March 1905)
- Honorary Consul Robert Meyer (15 May 1906 - 1909)
- Honorary Consul Theodor von Drachenfels (27 May 1910 - 1915)
- Honorary Administrator Louis Nettement (14 May 1915 - 1920)
- Honorary Administrator Ernst Oberle (30 July 1921 – 31 December 1922)

After the resignation of Professor Emille Tallichet from



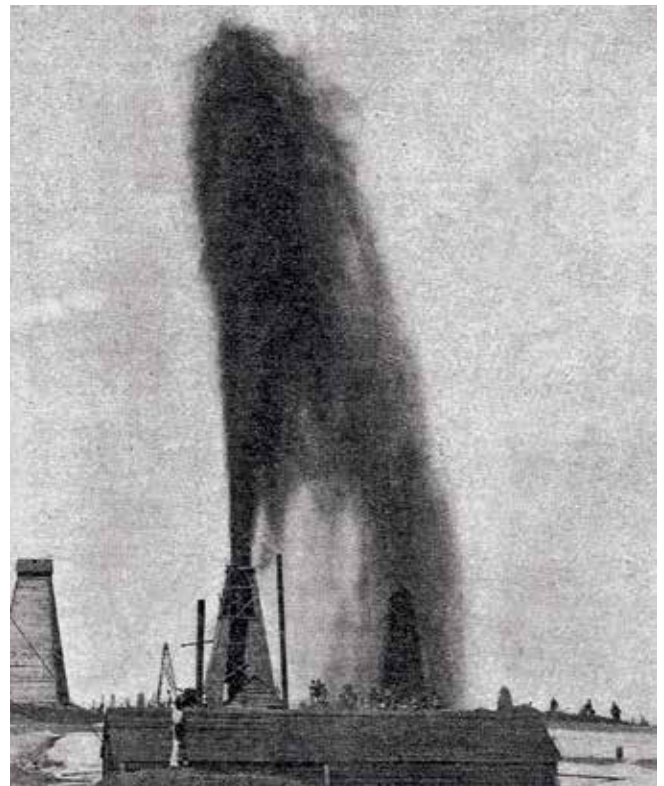
### *Oil gusher in Baku in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century*

the Swiss canton of Vaud in 1905, the Commerce and Industry Society of Switzerland did not respond positively to the appointment of a new consul in his stead as Tiflis was of no interest to Swiss export-oriented businesses. Switzerland appealed to Germany and asked if the German consulate in Tiflis would provide services for citizens of Switzerland. Berlin responded positively to this issue. However, the services provided by the German consulate were not satisfactory for Swiss people living in the Caucasus. In May 1905, a group of businessmen working in the village of Garabulag in Borchali appealed to the Swiss president, informed him of their problems and asked him to help to resolve them. The letter said that the local population set fire to the pastures, and therefore, the animals were starving and threatened with death. This letter also said that entrepreneurs considered stopping their activities in Russia and returning to Switzerland due to the revolutionary atmosphere in Russia. Considering the appeal of Swiss farmers, the government sent a new consul to Tiflis in May 1906.

One of the Swiss businessmen engaged in cheese production in the Caucasus was the Ammeter family, who came to the region in 1879. The family's enmity with one of the local Caucasus residents led to the dismissal of Consul Robert Meyer, who was appointed to replace Emille Tallichet. In 1909, Johann Ammeter, a representative of the Ammeter family, was killed by robbers. Despite the robber's arrest, the Swiss did not consider themselves safe. Forty Swiss families appealed to the Federal Council in Bern for more security measures for their protection by tsarist Russia. Consul Meyer did not want to blame everything on the local population and said that the Ammeter family's attitude towards the local population was problematic. He assessed the appeal of the Swiss people living in the Caucasus to the Federal Council in Bern as a vote of confidence in himself, sent a harshly-worded letter to the Swiss government and quit his job (3).

Although Switzerland's consular activities abroad were conducted by business circles, Bern provided the consulates with financial support. The consulate in Tiflis was provided with 1,000-1,500 Swiss francs in financial support. However, this amount was not enough to run the consulate. In a letter to the Swiss Federal Council in 1909, Consul Robert Meyer stated that consular expenses were from 5,000 to 6,000 Swiss francs.

It would be interesting to note that Theodor von Drachenfels, who served as the consul after Robert



Meyer, had no Swiss citizenship. He was recognized by the Swiss Federal Council as suitable for this post because he was well aware of the problems facing the Swiss while working for the German consulate in Tiflis. However, Robert Meyer resisted the handover of this position to him, and after the handover, he launched a campaign against Theodor von Drachenfels in the Swiss colony in the Caucasus. Theodor von Drachenfels applied for Swiss citizenship to insure himself against these campaigns in 1914, but his appeal was rejected because he had not lived in Switzerland for 2 years. After the outbreak of World War I, there were suspicious that Theodor von Drachenfels had joined the anti-Russian movement. In this situation, Theodor von Drachenfels could not function effectively as the consul of a neutral country, and considering this, the Swiss Federal Council thanked him for five years of service and terminated his job. Former Consul Robert Meyer wanted to return to his former position, and the Swiss Federal Council reluctantly agreed. However, it was necessary to make sure that Meyer would be recognized as a consul by Russia. The French consul in Tiflis, Bergonon, had secretly convinced the Swiss Federal Council that Russia would not recognize Meyer as the consul. From 1915, the French consulate was instructed to protect the rights of Swiss people in the Caucasus. (4)



*Baku oil fields in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century*

Louis Nettement, who led Swiss consular activities, appointed a representative to Azerbaijan during his tenure. The delegate was Henry Clottu.

**Status of the Swiss representative office in Azerbaijan and Henry Clottu.** According to Azerbaijani sources, at the time of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, there was a Swiss representative office at 14 Birjevaya Street in Baku, and the office was headed by Consul Henry Clottu.

The Swiss Federal Archives say that Henry Clottu worked in Baku as a correspondent for the consulate in Tiflis and was not given such a position by the Swiss Federal Council. The reason for such contradictions is the situation surrounding consuls who led Swiss foreign policy in the early 20th century. Those who conducted Swiss diplomatic activities in the early 20th century were mainly representatives of the business community and represented the interests of Switzerland in addition to their business activities.

Archives from the city of Biel, Switzerland, say that Henry Clottu was born in Biel in 1886.

In 1907, Henry Clottu moved to Warsaw. In the 1920s, Henry Clottu's name is mentioned along with the Swiss representative office in Baku and Gossweiler & Cie.

Some of the material in the Swiss Federal Archive regarding the existence of Henry Clottu's official functions is of particular interest. A letter to the Swiss consulate in Tiflis from the Political Department of the Swiss Foreign Ministry on August 5, 1921 states that the Foreign Ministry had received information that two Swiss nationals posed as consuls in Baku and Batumi (Loxer in Batumi, Clottu in Baku) and issued an instruction to verify that information. It says that if Loxer and Clottu are reliable people, the procedure of granting them the necessary credentials could begin (5).

On December 13, 1921, the Swiss Police for Foreigners appealed to the Swiss Foreign Ministry to verify the authenticity of the certificate issued by the Swiss consulate in Baku. The appeal states that Baku is not on the list of Switzerland's missions abroad and that they have not received any information from the Swiss Foreign Ministry about the existence of a consular office in Baku. On December 14, 1921, a response from the Swiss consulate in Tiflis to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs refers to Gossweiler & Co and its CEO, Fleury, and says "this company, which is run by mysterious Jews, carries out speculative operations under the Swiss flag." It is noted that Loxer is relatively innocent and has a passive nature. Henry Clottu, who is financially dependent on Gossweiler & Co, is described as a "person who cannot be talked about positively."

A response letter addressed to the Police for Foreigners by the Swiss Foreign Ministry on December 20, 1921 says that Loxer and Clottu are "correspondents" of the consulate in Tiflis and have no authority to represent Switzerland abroad.

A letter to the Swiss Political Department dated July 16, 1920 by Belart-Lanz, a Swiss businessman engaged in trading in oriental carpets in Istanbul, is important in terms of demonstrating the status of the Swiss representative office in Baku (6). The letter reads:

*Your Excellency,*

*Since my visit to Switzerland was delayed for several days, I would like to send you a very brief overview of my activities in Baku during the 2 months following the 27 April Soviet Revolution in order to give you an idea of the state of the Swiss people there. I intend to submit a detailed report to you personally in Bern in August.*

*I was in Baku last autumn and the revolution there surprised me.*

*The representative of the Tiflis-based Swiss consulate in Baku, Mr Clottu, was not in Baku during the revolution, which began at 11 p.m. on April 28.*

*Immediately after hearing about the arrest of the British and Georgian consuls, the French representative, and many British, Greek, Georgian, Polish and other nationals, seeing that no one cared about these people in the early days, and taking into account the very important interests of Switzerland in Baku, I decided to act as a representative of Switzerland to protect the interests of Switzerland and assist foreign prisoners. At that time, I could only rely on economic credentials from Mr. Meyer, a special representative in Tiflis at the time, but soon received an instruction*





*Tiflis in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century*

from the majority of the Swiss people present in Baku to represent the Swiss consulate in accordance with Annex 1. Finally, two months after my departure from the country, I received a letter from the Swiss consulate designating me as a temporary "Swiss representative in Azerbaijan" ("Délégué de la Représentation Helvétique en Azerbaïdjan"). As a representative of the exchange center in Bern, I also took steps in trade dealings for East Constantinople.

Henry Clottu, as a correspondent of the Azerbaijani consulate in Tiflis, as noted in the aforesaid letter, was designated not by Robert Meyer, but by Louis Nettelement, who engaged in Swiss consular work after him. Another issue is the wrong name of Switzerland (Délégué de la Représentation Helvétique en Azerbaïdjan). Helvétique was the official name used for this country during Napoleon's occupation of Switzerland. On the other hand, Robert Meyer resigned from his post in 1909, and Lanz's unawareness of this is noteworthy.

The letter also contains information on the treatment of the Swiss at that time:

*I will report the details later. Today, I want to give you just a brief overview of what I have achieved on key issues.*

1. Annex 2 - / Delegation of the Law/ - The pre-revolutionary laws for Swiss goods in Azerbaijan remain in effect.
2. I was able to place the Swiss goods I am aware of in Baku in a special "warehouse of goods belonging to Swiss citizens" and buy the necessary papers to protect them from confiscation.

3. Annex 3 - / General Russian information report to all Swiss people residing in Baku/ - I was able to get freedom from confiscation for property, furniture and personal belongings of Swiss citizens living in Azerbaijan.

4. I succeeded in making the National Economic Council of Azerbaijan create favorable conditions for future trade exchanges with Switzerland by recognizing property rights and ensuring that the newly-adopted laws have no reverse effect. I will report this to you in detail in Bern.

*After I achieved what I listed above, I decided to leave for Switzerland where my family lives, and handed over consular documents to the US Representative, Dr. Spoer, whom I met during my work here, and asked him to represent Switzerland's interests until Mr. Clottu's return. While in Tiflis, I caused Mr. Clottu to return to Baku and informed him of the steps taken by me.*

*All of the Swiss people who accidentally found themselves in Baku have left the country. All those who settled there preferred to stay in Baku. The only exception is Mr. Mottier. He would like to go to Switzerland with his family and child, but doesn't have enough money for it.*

*Until my departure date - June 26 - we, the Swiss, were generally treated very well by the Bolsheviks. The only Swiss, named Simmons Leonce from Ilanz, who was mistakenly detained, was released about 16 hours later. The organization apologized in every way for this error.*

*Switzerland has a great reputation in Bolshevik Azerbaijan. This has been repeatedly used against me.*

Switzerland has an exceptional position there, and given that Baku will always be an important transitional point where great Swiss interests will be concentrated, I have to say that Switzerland must have permanent, direct representation there.

If I decided to act as a representative of Switzerland without proper credentials in my hands, I did so simply because of the need for prompt action; My belief that you will not reject my actions later gave me the necessary confidence; my connections with top officials also helped me.

I would also like to add a few words about other foreign prisoners. Despite my efforts for a month, I have not had any success in their release due to lack of special credentials. Also, the Dutch, Persian and American consuls who actively dealt with this issue shortly after me have had little success. Before I left the country, six French prisoners, including government official Pierre Duroy were released with the help of an authoritative mediator on condition of a greater trade deal with the Azerbaijani government. Until that happens, those six people are not allowed to leave Azerbaijan. During my departure from the country, three French citizens, as well as about 50 British citizens were still in custody. The Georgian consul, of course, was released during the opportunity to negotiate peace with Georgia. Foreign missions in Tiflis also charged him with protecting their interests.

On May 8, I wanted to inform you about the detention of foreigners and untouchability of neutrals. I asked the government to allow me to send Mr. Meyer – I was not aware of his dismissal yet - a radiogram about it. As the government hesitated to allow names to be named there, various changes were made to my telegram. Finally, we agreed an appropriate text for Annex 4. Did you get that telegram? The trade-related part of the telegram was incorporated into the text at the demand of the chairman of the Revolutionary Committee, Huseynov.

In conclusion, I want to remind you of a one-off case that is not good for a Swiss person. Dr. Lucien Cand from Bances was on a transit trip to Tehran with his family and was in Tiflis when the revolution started in Baku. He had sent his 18 pieces of luggage in advance from Batum. This luggage consisted of his mobile home appliances, tools, and numerous packages of medicines. I did not know about it in Baku. In early June, Dr. Cand came to Baku and we sadly learned that his luggage had been confiscated on May 15 by "the 11th Russian Army Trophy Commission" near the train. Unfortunately, the commodities arrived at the time when the Trophy Commission began its totally groundless operation in "allied" Azerbaijan. This activity was soon halted by the

government of Azerbaijan. Dr. Cand asked for 76,000 Swiss francs in compensation for the damage from the Azerbaijani government. The government expressed regret over the unfounded incident and vowed to resolve the matter in a way that pleases the victim. Dr. Cand did not want to stay in Baku for longer, and the case was entrusted to Mr. Clottu.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to express my deep respect to you.

Another letter from Belart Lanz dated August 26, 1920 states that after the establishment of Soviet rule in Azerbaijan, the Swiss were treated much better than citizens of other countries. It says that Azerbaijan produces oil, cotton, silk, and carpets, which are of interest to the Swiss economy. He notes that immediately after the revolution, the chairman of the Revolutionary Committee, M. Huseynov, told him that he wished to continue relations with Switzerland. He also said that he had received permission from the Revolutionary Committee to collect the goods of Swiss citizens from Azerbaijan. He once again emphasized the importance of Azerbaijan for the Swiss economy and said that it considered it necessary to open a Swiss trade representative office in the Caucasus and Turkestan (7).

Other archival materials show that Azerbaijan is no longer a reliable place, as Belart Lanz mentioned. He focuses on the problems faced by Gossweiler & Gie in Baku. It draws attention to the fact that Swiss companies wishing to establish relations with Bolshevik Russia are free to do so, but the Swiss government must also accept the existing risks for these companies (8). A letter from the Swiss Foreign Ministry to Gossweiler & Gie states that it is not possible to provide assistance to the company as Switzerland has no relations with Bolshevik Russia (9).

Henry Clottu confirms that he was not in the country during the Soviet revolution. In a letter dated July 30, 1920, to the President of the Lucerne-based Swiss Leatherworkers Association, Yean Kuhn, Clottu says he will soon be forced to leave Azerbaijan (10). A document dated September 25, 1920 states that Kuhn wanted to visit Azerbaijan, Switzerland had no representation in any of the Caucasus countries, and there was a need for representation due to Switzerland's economic interests (11).

Documents from the Swiss archives show that Swiss people who lived in Azerbaijan in the 19th and 20th centuries had a special role in Swiss-Azerbaijani relations. Despite differences in religion, language, and ethnicity, the two peoples enjoyed friendly relationships and lived in peace. The Swiss, who regarded Azerbaijan as their second homeland, were able to contribute to the Azer-



*Building of the City Council. Baku, contemporary photo*

bajjani economy as well. Even after the establishment of Soviet rule, there was no mistreatment of the Swiss. On the other hand, our compatriots, who came to Switzerland to study, played a great role in the development of these relations. At the same time, progressive intellectuals of the 20th century, who had a deep understanding of the importance of international relations, did a great job in promoting Azerbaijan around the world. Documents from the Swiss archives show what kind of purposeful and consistent efforts were made in this regard. Given Switzerland's geopolitical importance, Switzerland was one of the main propaganda centers. 🌱

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