

THE FINNISH LEGATION

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Mr. Foreign Minister,

As I reported in my telegram. I presented my credentials yesterday to President Roosevelt, whereupon speeches, or as they are called here, notes were exchanged on both sides as customary here. The President had told that he wishes to discuss with me in connection with the reception, before he after some days will go on a few weeks' vacation, and therefore the reception is wished to be held as free-form. This opportunity for discussion was, of course, most pleasant for me. The President received me in his study, and no-one else was present except just in the beginning and end of the reception. The discussion went on for nearly three quarters of an hour. My speech and the quite friendly reply by the President are included as copies here.

The president started the discussion by stating that he wished to arrange the reception this way to be able to discuss freely. The President said that he wants to tell about the secret meeting of the Senate's Military Affairs Committee in the beginning of February, in which

Mr. Minister for Foreign Affairs Eljas Erkko, Helsinki.

it was argued in the press that he had commented the US border being on the Rhine or at the French border. "I never told that but I instead took Finland as a starting point, a matter I wanted to tell you" - said the President. He told the in that meeting he approximately said this. The United States safety is not only in their army, navy and industry. It is based also on the existence of independent free countries in Europe, which can put a stop to expansion of dictatorships. If we take as example Finland, situated there most far-away, it is absolutely important for the safety of the United States and the world peace that such a country stays independent and free in relations to her political, economic and civil rights. I assumed that when the President spoke about dictatorships, he meant chiefly the Axis Powers but when we during the conversation had mentioned in passing Russia, the President clarified his statement by saying that this maintenance of integrity is equally important in every direction. The President still said to the Committee that the same includes all Nordic and Baltic countries. And he had further emphasized that those countries, which have a common borders with Germany form a special case – as, said he, later events in Czechoslovakia have shown. The strategic position of Germany has through this essentially changed and her frontline has made advance.

One could draw the conclusion from the President's presentation that the United States

can't take an indifferent attitude towards events in Europe. He ended his presentation with saying that a line should be drawn between the Axis Powers and the rest of the world and by this a limit be defined to their expansion. This led the discussion to the question of to which extent the United States are in general ready to take part in common international cooperation. Lately, there have been in the press lots of views about the attitude the US should take to a conference between those countries, which are mainly interested in stopping the expansion of Axis Power influence, and the British initiative about a common declaration of certain countries concerning this. The President avoided touching this though the general impression in his presentation was positive to the cooperation.

When speaking about this I have to remark that when I spoke with some highest officials in the Department of State I was told that the US participation in measures like this is currently hardly thinkable.

To my question the US taking part in international operations, the President frankly said: "I will not send, as happened in 1917-1918, an army of two millions to Europe but I will give the US material help if needed". The President added that the Neutrality Law, which prevents selling of war material to belligerent countries, will be either totally abrogated or revised in the nearest future so that the freedom of action for the US Government grows. The Chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee Senator Pittman has recently suggested that the law should be revised so that selling of war material to belligerent countries should be arranged in accordance with the so called "cash and carry" principle. The President seemed to assume that at least this revision will be passed. This principle means that a belligerent country can freely buy war material if only it is paid cash and exported out of the country in non-US ships.

The President's presentation gave me an opportunity, in connection to what the President had said e.g. about the independent position of Finland, to make a reference to the general line of the Finnish foreign policy, Nordic cooperation and especially to the question of fortification of the Aaland Islands. I emphasized the strict neutrality of our country and the Nordic cooperation in this aspect. I explained, when the President asked, the history and prehistory of the fortification restrictions in the Aaland Islands, and the present situation there stressing especially that the proposition, made together with Sweden, means the continuous defence of the neutrality of the Aaland Islands against all invasions. This was met with special satisfaction by the President.

The President asked about our relations with Russia and commented that they, he thinks, cause no worries in Finland, as this time there hardly is any danger of attack on the Finns from Russia.

Answering this, I shortly explained our relations with Russia. I told that it has been and it will be the Finnish policy to maintain regular and good relations with Russia but despite of this Russia always creates a potential threatening danger, explaining this with

certain events in recent years. This made the President to make the remark, I mentioned earlier, that naturally Finland has to ready to defend her integrity and neutrality in every directions.

The President's statements allowed me to ask directly, to what extent Finland might expect US support when needed. Could we count on a diplomatic support so that the US with their prestige might point out to a great power that might threaten Finland that our country must be left in peace – of course, on the condition that the US are convinced of our honest will of neutrality. This kind of action might apply to a power, against whose policy the US are, as well as also, and probably especially, to a country that has friendly relations with the US. Without doubt, the President's reply was affirmative.

After explaining shortly that we can defend our neutrality, when we get necessary material support from outside, I asked further if it possible in general and especially under a pan-European crisis or when Finland is under a threat of war, or when it already has started, to get material support in the form of war materiel. The President remarked that provided we stay neutral, we can buy war materiel here; in case of war, the situation will be the same – if the US Neutrality War will be revised as the President assumed, we again can count on, said the President, being able to buy war materiel here.

Finally I asked if we could, in cases referred above, granted the credit we need for this. The President paused for a moment but stated then that it can hardly be in a form granted by the US government but there are other ways using banks, especially as the so-called Johnson Act, denying loans to certain countries is not applicable to Finland as our country fulfils her obligations. This President's statement must probably be interpreted so that in his estimation the US government would not oppose granting a loan.

When we spoke about the "cash and carry" principle, mentioned above, I made a remark that this could be a little bit less advantageous to a small country, whose merchant fleet would not probably be big enough to take the purchased war materiel out of the country: other tonnage might be hard to find as the American ships are out of the question. The President remarked that in that case the merchant fleets of other countries might probably be available, and he added, that it could also be very probable that American ships in a situation like this might change their nationalities. However, I myself thought but didn't tell this to the President that the latter possibility can come up against rather big difficulties as a very large percentage of the American merchant fleet is built with government support, which makes any change of nationality very difficult.

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The arrangement that the reception was made free-form and, this way, giving an opportunity to a face-to-face discussion, was apparently as told in the Department of

State, too, was meant to be a friendly token and an indication of sympathy of the President towards our country. The discussion expanded, however, to cover rather far-reaching subjects as told above, and the President's statements were rather positive. I, however, see that the meaning of the discussion should not be overestimated. First, the discussion was between two people, not in the presence of the Secretary of the State, so that it presents the attitude of the President but it do not bind the Government. Second, the President all the time stressed that Finland must stay on the anti-German side, or at least, keeps a strict neutrality so that in no circumstances Finland could be counted among supporters or special friends of Germany. But, despite of these reservations the statements of President Roosevelt are so significant, that I considered them worth of being reported to you, Mr. Minister, in such a details.

I still say, that President Roosevelt was personally very friendly. He expressed his joy when seeing me again, and in the end he invited me to visit him agin after he returns from his vacation.

Please accept, Mr. Minister, the expression of my most sincere respect.

Hj. J. Procopé.