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MEETING OF EXPERTS ON PASSPORTS AND FRONTIER FORMALITIES
REVISED MINUTES OF THE SECOND PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on
Tuesday, 15 April, 1947, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman : Mr. CAREW-ROBINSON (United Kingdom)

1. GENERAL DISCUSSION.

Before opening the general discussion, the CHAIRMAN said that he had two points for the attention of the meeting. First, he would ask representatives to speak more loudly as the acoustics were not good, and, secondly, he drew the attention of the meeting to Rule 57 of the Rules of Procedure of the Economic and Social Council stating that resolutions and amendments should be submitted in writing. He hoped that delegations would adhere to that rule and would have resolutions ready in good time for delivery to the Secretariat.

Mr. WU Nan-Ju (China) considered that the issues before the meeting, although they might appear insignificant, were of considerable importance in connexion with the development of amity and good relations between nations. Free intercourse and personal contact between peoples were the only grounds on which international peace could be based.

It was a fact that science had facilitated travel but administrative measures had circumvented freedom of movement. Work was being done internationally, to free travel, hence this meeting, yet many restrictions remained.

The Chinese representative pointed out that the terms of reference of the meeting were limited to the non-immigrant category of traveller and other categories would not be the concern of the meeting. He added that the Chinese Government had always been well-disposed towards foreign travellers. The laws and regulations had never been harsh or strict, and it might be said that China had literally held an "open door" to foreigners. It was true that during the war certain formalities had been introduced, but immediately on the conclusion of hostilities, the Chinese Government had ordered the relaxation of certain rules.

In conclusion, Mr. WU Nan-Ju summarized his country's position on passport and frontier problems in the following points:

(1) Chinese diplomatic and consular missions abroad were authorized to visa, without reference to their home

Government, passports, not only of diplomats and officials but also of missionaries and persons engaged in commerce and industry:

(2) Chinese diplomatic and consular missions abroad could give a visa to a foreign applicant from an area outside, but adjacent to, their jurisdiction, provided there was no other Chinese mission in that area;

(3) Visas could be obtained by post, though personal appearance might be required if the authority in charge deemed it necessary;

(4) Diplomatic visas could be obtained from a Chinese consular mission in a country where there was no Chinese diplomatic mission, or when there was no time for the applicant to secure it from the Chinese diplomatic mission;

(5) No time limit was set on entrance or transit visas for diplomatic and official passports. On ordinary passports the period of validity for an entrance visa was six months and for transit visas it was unlimited, though the number of transits was limited to one journey;

(6) Frontier formalities in China were in many respects simpler than those existing in other countries; for example, police control was always carried out simultaneously with customs inspection.

Finally, the Chinese representative stated that his Government was prepared to go to further lengths, together with all other Governments, towards the simplification of travel and would do its utmost to contribute towards the success of the meeting.

Mr. PÉRIER (France) said that his country was directly interested in freedom of travel and hence in the successful outcome of the meeting. France was traditionally a country of international contacts and to travel in Europe one must nearly always cross France.

The passports now used in his country were very much in conformity with the suggestions made at the Passport Conference in 1926. France had discussed and concluded bilateral agreements to abolish visas and had taken provisions to simplify visas for tourists. It might be remembered that at the PICAQ Conference France had suggested the system of an international travel card, which had been discussed there, and the French representative hoped it would also come under examination at this meeting. He believed that it would simplify many problems.

Mr. PRZEJMSKI (Poland) indicated that the Polish Government was well disposed towards the simplification of regulations permitting foreigners to travel to Poland. He added, however, that in the opinion of his Government, the present passport and visa regulations would seem to be, in the light of larger practice, quite satisfactory and that any simplification should be made rather in the technical regulations governing passport and visa procedure. Any major changes would seem to be a little premature.

He found it difficult to agree that nationals of ex-enemy States and their satellites should enjoy the same liberty of movement in Poland as did nationals of ex-allied States. Germans in Poland had liberty of movement in one direction only - westward. He was sure that other representatives would concur in those views when Poland's experiences and suffering during the war were taken into account.

Polish nationals at home and abroad could obtain passports for private or official business without any difficulties. Observing the present tendencies apparent in this conference, there was no need for any fear that they would encounter difficulties in obtaining visas necessary for journeys involving private or official business. Mr. Przewanski recalled, however, that the post-war period required a certain amount of caution, and mentioned in this connexion the Greek representative's speech of yesterday in which he had talked of certain frontier reservations.

He presumed that the present conference would prepare recommendations for submission to Governments, and that views would be submitted for a future world conference. In conclusion, the Polish representative said that the present interim position might well improve in the future and reservations made now might by then have disappeared.

Mr. CONTEMPRE (Belgium) explained that the position of the Government of Belgium towards the problems of visas and passports was most liberal. Belgium had not waited for an international conference before discussion measures to alleviate passport and frontier problems. During the past year, discussions had been held with the Scandinavian countries, the United Kingdom, and Ireland, on the abolition of visas; as the result of a reciprocal agreement with the United States of America, American citizens could be given a free visa for several visits with a validity of one full year.

Consular offices of his Government situated abroad had authority to grant visas directly to citizens of non-enemy countries. Those visas were valid for a maximum of two months, after which time the current regulations came into force.

Belgium had facilitated all simplification measures in as easy and practicable a manner as possible, particularly in regard to customs inspection on trains crossing the Belgian frontiers.

Regarding the issue of passports to Belgian nationals, Mr. Contempré said that the passports followed the decisions of the 1926 Conference and that they were issued on a fairly free basis to everyone. Passports could be valid up to two years. He concluded by indicating the desire of his Government to assist in further collaboration and co-operation.

In reply to the reference made by the representative of Poland, Mr. EMBIRICOS-COUMOUNDOUROS (Greece) emphasized that any reservation he had made regarding the maintenance in Greece of restrictions for an indeterminate length of time was caused by the situation existing at present on the northern frontier of Greece, which was of a temporary character.

Mr. TAIT (United States of America) said that his Government had instructed him to say that it believed free intercourse between peoples, and freedom in international travel were two principles of the greatest importance. They were vital for the expansion of world trade and for the furtherance of economic exchanges.

In view of this, the representative of the United States made the following suggestions on behalf of his Government:

(1) The Government of the United States would favour the international type of passport, or an improved version thereof, such as the present U.S. passport. This passport should be valid for all countries and should have a minimum validity period of two years.

(2) The United States Government would wish that exit visas should be universally abolished and other exit formalities reduced to a minimum. Similarly, visa procedure should be simplified and standardized as much as possible.

(3) It should be universally accepted that distinctions exist in visa requirements between countries having, and those not having, quantitative immigration restrictions.

(4) The United States Government would be in favour of relaxing restrictions on currency regulations wherever possible.

Finally, Mr. Tait emphasised that his Government was in full agreement with all measures designed for the simplification of passport and frontier procedure.

The CHAIRMAN, speaking as a representative of the United Kingdom, said that his Government was in agreement with the objectives of the present conference, hence his presence at this meeting. The British Minister for Foreign Affairs had said that he would like to take a ticket and be able to go anywhere with it. This position unfortunately did not hold and had not existed since before 1914. In the intervening period two wars had made many changes in the situation.

It should be remembered that at present movement was hampered not only by formalities but also by world pressure on accommodation and means of transport. Mr. Robinson thought that it might be useful to set as an ultimate objective the pre-1914 state of affairs, but he pleaded with representatives to be realistic in their approach and not to attempt vague and high-sounding resolutions until the conditions for the accomplishment of these resolutions had been further clarified.

He thought it desirable that major measures of simplification, such as the substitution of another document for the international passport, should be examined critically, taking into consideration whether such other document would really effect an improvement.

Mr. PRZEWANSKI (Poland) suggested that before detailed discussion of the various proposals, there should be a brief suspension of perhaps twenty minutes to give representatives an opportunity of informal exchange of views.

The CHAIRMAN felt the proposal was a useful one. Before putting the point to the meeting, however, he invited addresses from the Vicomte de Rohan, President of the International Automobile Federation, and from Mr. Britschgi, representative of the International Touring Alliance.

2. VIEWS OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS.

The Vicomte DE ROHAN, as President of the International Automobile Federation, and also in the name of the International Touring Alliance, asked permission for a declaration to be made on behalf of both bodies by Mr. Britschgi. The two organizations could claim some experience in the subject before the Conference. He instanced the creation of the carnet de passage en douane for vehicles and pointed out that they had been working on the whole question for the last fifty years.

Mr. BRITSCHGI (International Touring Alliance) said that the meeting must find a compromise between the legitimate desire of individuals for reasonable freedom of movement and the idea that the various States must take special preventive measures against aliens. It was the duty of the International Automobile Federation and of the International Touring Alliance to express the point of view of those who were the object, if not the victims, of the various controls precedent to the crossing of a frontier. The two bodies considered that discussions of the Conference must be inspired by the following principles:

Firstly, international travel promoted commercial intercourse and mutual understanding among nations; it was a logical sequel to the development of the technical means of transport: of railways, automobiles and aeroplanes. In normal times the great majority of travellers were honest people, travelling for such honourable motives as business, visits to friends, the improvement of their health or the widening of their intellectual horizon. These people deserved to be hospitably treated. It was very easy to prove that the various controls were established to hinder the entrance of undesirable aliens, but the question had to be asked whether this really justified general measures against aliens, which might very likely become a modern form of xenophobia. It was desirable that the police of a country should display exactly the same attitude towards aliens as towards their own nationals.

Furthermore, too much importance must not be attributed to the preventive effect of controls. Such controls might very well create many difficulties for people who respected the laws and regulations and might militate against international intercourse, whilst the really undesirable alien would not hesitate to avail himself of illegal means of entry, such as the forgery of identity papers or clandestine crossing of borders.

When they considered the effects of the system of minute controls before a foreigner was admitted to a country, he felt that the scales were definitely in favour of greater freedom. It was certain that all who believed in the possibility of realizing the ideal of the United Nations expected from the meeting a simplification of the present passport and visa system and also of frontier formalities.

The CHAIRMAN invited Mr. Stoppani, representative of the International Chamber of Commerce, to address the Conference.

Mr. STOPPANI (International Chamber of Commerce) said the body he represented had submitted a report on the whole subject before the meeting, but he wished to make reference to certain points in the covering letter to the Secretary-General. The position now was of course very different from the state of freedom before 1914, and he did agree that they must be realistic before anything else. He felt that it was not always possible or desirable to separate completely the question of substance from the question of form, and he suggested that in its discussions the meeting should not try to make too sharp a distinction between the two questions: in fact, he hoped it would go very much further and allow some questions of substance to be considered at the present session.

Under present conditions, even a country favourable to travellers from abroad might have a passport service so bureaucratic that after having filled up a number of forms, the traveller would be referred to the health authorities, food-control and so on, and required to fill up still further forms. That was something to be avoided. He felt, therefore, that he was speaking in the name not only of the International Chamber of Commerce but also in that of the International Automobile Federation and International Touring Alliance in stressing that they should discuss practical questions as well as questions of form.

He foresaw a certain danger if they should give undue emphasis to the question of standardization. It was not, after all, so long since the end of the last war, and instead of complaining too much, they might remember that certain progress had, in fact, been made and certain countries had made arrangements for the facilitation of travel with friendly neighbour States. Standardization might be effected on a minimum basis but it should not be of such a kind as would militate against practical agreements between one country and another or prevent the further development of such arrangements.

The CHAIRMAN invited Major Clarke, representative of the European Central Inland Transport Organization, to address the meeting.

Major CLARKE (ECITO) said he would like, on behalf of the Director General of the European Central Inland Transport Organization, to draw attention to the documents already submitted by that body to the meeting. In addition to the reasons already given for facilitating international travel, there was another important reason - the great shortage of transport facilities at the present

time. Any reduction in delays at frontiers would considerably ameliorate the general carrying capacity of the European transport system. For this, among many other reasons, it was particularly important that the meeting should attempt to agree, wherever possible, to reduce such delays, and he hoped that at least in this respect some improvement would be effected.

The CHAIRMAN felt that they would not be able to consider certain recommendations in detail in the full meeting. He suggested that the meeting should agree, if possible, on the general principles and form of their recommendations and should then remit them to a drafting committee to be put into acceptable shape. He felt it his duty as Chairman of the meeting - if they were agreeable - to act as Chairman of the Drafting Committee, and suggested that the two conference Vice-Chairmen be also members. He thought it important that the Committee be kept to the reasonably small number of seven or eight members, and that their appointment be taken as the first item on the draft agenda in the afternoon.

In addition to documents already brought to the notice of the representatives, he drew their attention to the document E/CONF/PASS/PC.7, in which the United States delegation had put forward specific recommendations for discussion. The United Kingdom delegation had also put down some recommendations on very similar lines and those would be circulated as soon as possible. He thought the representatives had all had the questionnaire form which the Government of the United Kingdom had suggested should be circulated, and the answers to which had been provided so far as the United Kingdom was concerned. He stressed that the purpose of the questionnaire was merely to obtain information; it had been felt that it would save time and trouble if the representatives could have before them the actual arrangements in force in the different countries, and he thought that the same point had already been made by speakers at the present session. Representatives would assist the deliberations by providing, as soon as possible, answers to the questionnaire, which would indicate what progress had been made since the discussions which led to the adoption of the international type of passport and the various proposals made in 1926, and how far there had been some departure from that standard.

The CHAIRMAN then asked for views on the proposal by the representative of Poland for twenty minutes' suspension, suggesting that the adjournment be taken forthwith and that the meeting resume rather earlier in the afternoon.

Mr. PERIER (France) pointed out that a resumption earlier than the time already arranged might interfere with engagements which had been made in advance by certain of the delegations. Mr. EMBIRICOS-COUMOUNDOUROS (Greece) supported him on this point.

The meeting rose at 12.18 p.m.