

1121. Free City of Danzig Site of a Depot for Polish War Material (including Explosives) in Transit through Danzig.

M. SAHM, representative of the Free City of Danzig, and M. SKIRMUNT, representative of Poland, came to the Council table.

M. QUIÑONES DE LEÓN read his report (Annex 590).

M. SKIRMUNT, representative of Poland, said that the depot on the island of Holm was insufficient for Poland's needs. The question was of so technical a character that experts should be appointed to examine it and to furnish the Council with their opinion. Poland's right to a depot for explosives was incontestable, as also was the right of the Free City to safeguard its security.

M. SAHM, representative of the Free City, reminded the Council that during its recent sessions Poland and the Free City of Danzig had been able to settle in a friendly way a large number of legal disputes. To his great regret such a settlement had not been possible in the question of the storage of munitions in transit, for the question of the life and safety of the inhabitants was here involved.

Poland had, under the Paris Treaty the right to transport munitions of war across the territory of the Free City and Danzig had never placed any obstacle in the way of such transportation. Poland, on the other hand, had no right to establish a depot, even of a temporary character, for war material. The two parties had agreed at Geneva, on June 22nd, 1921, to the following provisions

(a) That a special site on the banks of the Vistula should be placed at the disposal of the Polish Government for the unloading of munitions

(b) That this site should be at a sufficient distance and as isolated as possible from all dwelling-houses.

The two parties were unable to agree that the most appropriate site for the establishment of this depot would be the island of Holm, but they had agreed to submit the question to the Harbour Board.

The reasons for which the Harbour Board had been asked to settle the question were connected with the provisions of Article 26 of the Paris Treaty and resulted from the technical competence of the Harbour Board, at the head of which was placed a President appointed by the Council of the League.

The President of the Harbour Board, after a thorough examination of the question, had declared that there did not exist on the banks of the Vistula any site suitable for the object required and at the same time sufficiently remote from the inhabited houses of the Free City. He accordingly recommended that the Polish port of Gdynia should be taken as the site which seemed most suitable for the unloading of munitions. This suggestion was not accepted by Poland, and the President of the Harbour Board had again declared that there did not exist any site in the Port of Danzig which complied, with the conditions of the Agreement of June 22nd, 1921. The island of Holm was, in consequence placed at the disposal of Poland as a provisional measure. Poland, however, had for two years never once made use of this site for the deposit of war material in transit, but had entrusted on its own initiative to the Harbour Board the task of transporting war material, including explosives.

The Harbour Board had accomplished this task in the most satisfactory manner. For financial reasons, neither of the two parties had taken advantage of the proposal made by General Haking to construct a special dock in the harbour for the transfer of war material.

What was the reason which had induced Poland to raise this question again ?

It was curious to note that Poland had given the terrible explosion which had occurred in the citadel of Warsaw in the previous month of October as a reason for stating that she was no longer able to accept responsibility for damage caused by an explosion should one occur. The Polish Government had added that the site given to Poland on the island of Holm for the landing of war material was insufficient, since it was necessary for Poland to import a large number of explosives for use in her mines through the port of Danzig. She asked, therefore, that all the northern part of Holm should be granted to her.

The second argument used by Poland was difficult for anyone who knew the situation to understand. All war material and explosives destined for use in Poland could be discharged and despatched without difficulty and with the greatest speed, although the site granted for this purpose by the Harbour Board was only a ship's length in extent. The eleven ships loaded with munitions and explosives which had entered the port of Danzig in 1922 and 1923 had been unloaded, in most cases in a few hours. Colonel de Revmier had confirmed this when he had stated that a considerably larger quantity could have been unloaded.

Further, by stating that she could not accept responsibility for any damage which might be caused by explosions, Poland went beyond the scope of the question submitted for the Council's decision and refused to agree to the essential conditions which she had been required to accept.

On the other hand, the terrible effects of the Warsaw catastrophe had again aroused among the citizens of Danzig apprehensions regarding the great danger which they would run through the existence of a depot of munitions, and had induced them to ask the Council of the League once more to examine General Haking's decision. An explosion on the island

of Holm would be all the more terrible in view of the fact that the centre of the City of Danzig, where the population was most dense, was scarcely two kilometres distant from the island.

Further, the unloading of explosives in the Polish war harbour of Gdynia would present no difficulty, as was proved by the case of the steamship "Kentucky" from which, on June 29th, 1923, 60 tons of gunpowder had been unloaded in about six hours without the least difficulty.

Consequently, he asked the Council of the League to take the following decisions

1. To abrogate the Decision of the High Commissioner dated April 7th, 1922.
2. To lay down that Poland, without prejudice to the transit rights granted to her by Articles 26 and 28 of the Paris Treaty, was not authorised to maintain a depot of explosives in transit on the territory of the Free City
3. To instruct the Danzig Harbour and River Boards to take the necessary measures to assure the transit of war material of all kinds, especially explosives.

He earnestly asked the Council to remove from the Free City which was under the special protection of the League, the danger which threatened it.

M. SKIRMUNT repeated that, as Poland's right to pass war material and explosives through Danzig was incontestable, the question of Gdynia should not be discussed. He pointed out, however, that not a single vessel loaded with explosives had been unloaded at Gdynia. The assertion made by M. Sahn on the question was therefore incorrect. He further explained that the amount of space on the island of Holm granted to Poland for that purpose was very narrow, not more than 180 metres wide, which made it both difficult and dangerous to deal with explosives. Had the whole island been granted to Poland, she would have been able to carry out the constructive works necessary to prevent the terrible consequences of accidents.

He assured the Council that both Danzig and Poland were entirely agreed as to the necessity of safeguarding the security of the inhabitants of Danzig, but the incontestable rights of Poland should not be lost sight of.

*The Council decided to postpone the discussion of this question to a later meeting.*

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## SIXTH MEETING (PUBLIC)

*Held at Paris on Thursday, December 13th, 1923, at 3.30. p.m.*

Present. All the representatives of the Members of the Council and the Secretary-General.

1122. Free City of Danzig Appointment of the High Commissioner of the League of Nations.

M. Skirmunt, representative of Poland, and M. Sahn, representative of the Free City of Danzig, came to the Council table.

M. QUIÑONES DE LEÓN moved the following resolution

"Mr. M. S. MACDONNELL is reappointed High Commissioner of the League of Nations in Danzig for a further period of one year from February 22nd, 1924. He will, during that period, be entitled to receive a salary at the rate of 80,000 gold francs per annum."

M. SKIRMUNT, representative of Poland, said he entirely agreed with the proposal of the Rapporteur that the term of office of the High Commissioner should be renewed for a period of one year.

As regarded the increase of 20,000 gold francs in salary authorised by the resolution, he felt it his duty to draw the attention of the Council to the very strict economy which had been introduced in the Polish budget. At such a moment, the increase of the salary of the High Commissioner was contrary to the imperative instructions issued by the Polish Government and would not therefore be welcomed by public opinion. He would not raise any objection to the increase, but he would abstain from voting. In any case, he desired to emphasise that this should be regarded as a temporary measure and that it should not in any way constitute a precedent.

M. SAHM, representative of Danzig, said that he had no objections to make.

*The resolution was adopted.*