

DECISION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS
ON THE ÅLAND ISLANDS
INCLUDING SWEDEN'S PROTEST
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IV.

MINUTES OF THE FOURTEENTH MEETING OF THE COUNCIL, JUNE 24TH.

All the Representatives of the Members of the Council, and the Secretary-General, were present.

M. BRANTING, representing Sweden, and M. ENCKELL, representing Finland, came to the Council table.

Mr. FISHER reminded the Council that the day before he had submitted certain fundamental principles concerning the Åland Islands Question. To-day, these general ideas had received the unanimous approval of the Council, with the exception, of course, of the two parties to the dispute.

Mr. Fisher then read the following draft resolution; -

❖ The Council at its meeting of June 24th, 1921, having regard to the fact that the two parties interested in the fate of the Åland Islands have consented that the Council of the League of Nations should be called upon to effect a settlement of the difficulties which have arisen, and that they have agreed to abide by its decision;

❖ After consideration of the Report of the Jurists which the question of the competence and of the decision of the Council, of September 20th, 1920, which recognised the aforesaid competence;

❖ And having reviewed all the geographical, ethnical, political, economic and military considerations set forth in the memorandum of the Rapporteurs, who undertook a thorough enquiry upon the request of the League of Nations;

❖ But having recognised, on the other hand, the desirability of a solution involving a maximum of security both for the population of the Islands and the parties concerned,

❖ Decides

❖ 1. The sovereignty of the Åland Islands is recognised to belong to Finland;

❖ 2. Nevertheless, the interests of the world, the future of cordial relations between Finland and Sweden, the prosperity and happiness of the Islands themselves cannot be ensured unless (a) certain further guarantees are given for the protection of the Islanders; and unless (b) arrangements are concluded for the non-fortification and neutralisation of the Archipelago.

❖ 3. The new guarantees to be inserted in the autonomy law should specially aim at the preservation of the Swedish language in the schools, at the maintenance of the landed property in the hands of the Islanders, at the restriction, within reasonable limits, of the exercise of the franchise by new comers, and at ensuring the appointment of a Governor who will possess the confidence of the population.

❖ 4. The Council has requested that the guarantees will be more likely to achieve their purpose, if they are discussed and agreed to by the Representatives of Finland with those of Sweden, if necessary with the assistance of the Council of the League of Nations, and, in accordance with the Council's desire, the two parties have decided to seek out an agreement. Should their efforts fail, the Council would itself fix the guarantees which, in its opinion, should be inserted, by means of an amendment, in the autonomy law of May, 7th, 1920. In any case, the Council of the League of Nations will see to the enforcement of these guarantees.

5. An international agreement in respect of the non-fortification and the neutralisation of the Archipelago should guarantee to the Swedish people and to all the countries concerned, that the Åland Islands will never become a source of danger from the military point of view. With this object, the convention of 1856 should be replaced by a broader agreement, placed under the guarantee of all the Powers concerned, including Sweden. The Council is of the opinion that this agreement should conform, in its main lines, with the Swedish draft Convention for the neutralisation of the Islands. The Council instructs the Secretary-General to ask the governments concerned to appoint duly accredited representatives to discuss and conclude the proposed Treaty.

Viscount ISHII said that he agreed with the text presented by Mr. Fisher.

M. HANOTAUX, the Marquis IMPERIALI, M. QUINONES DE LEON, Mr. WELLINGTON KOO, M. HYMANS, and M. DA CUNHA said that they also accepted the text presented by Mr. Fisher.

M. BRANTING read the following declaration:

On behalf of the Swedish Government I have the honour to make the following statement:

It is with a feeling of profound disappointment that the Swedish nation will learn of the Resolution of the Council of the League of Nations.

In supporting the cause of the people of the Åland Islands before Europe and the League of nations, Sweden was not influenced by the desire to increase her territory. She only wished to support noble and just aspirations and to defend the right of an absolutely homogenous island population to reunite itself to its mother-country, from which it had been detached by force, but to which it is still united by the ties of a common origin, a common history, and a common national spirit. This population has declared to the whole world its unanimous wish not to be bound to a country to which it had been joined by force of arms alone.

The Swedish Government had hoped that an institution, which was established to assist in the realisation of right in international relationships, would have favoured a solution of the Åland question in conformity with the principle of self-determination, which, although not recognised as a part of international law, has received so wide an application in the formation of the New Europe. It had hoped that the Ålanders would not be refused the rights, which have been recognised in respect of their Slesvig brothers, who belong, as do the Ålanders, to the Scandinavian race. It had hoped that, in the very special case under consideration, in which right appears so evident, and in which the wishes of the population have been expressed with such unusual unanimity, the League of Nations would have filled, at least on this occasion the rôle of the champion and defender of right, and thus, by its first decision, would have proclaimed the dawn of a new international order.

To-day, when the decision of the Council has frustrated that hope, the Swedish Government is obliged to express the fear that the Council has grievously shaken the confidence that the peoples, particularly those who, like Sweden, have long been striving to accomplish international law, have had in the League of nations an institution brought into being to make that law supreme in the world. If the League is to fulfil the great task entrusted to it by the Covenant, it is absolute necessary that it should possess that confidence.

The Swedish Government is not of opinion that the settlement of the Åland question which is suggested by the Council is likely to confer upon the Baltic area the peace that is desired. Nor yet is it of opinion that a population as homogenous as that of the Åland Islands, of whose wishes so little account has been taken, can add to the strength of a country to which it is attached against its unanimous desire.

Sweden is ready loyally to recognise that the decision of the Council has the force given to it by the Covenant. But Sweden will not abandon the hope that the day will come when the idea of justice shall have so permeated the conscience of the peoples, that the claims inspired by such noble motives and a national feeling as deep as that of the population of the Åland Isles will be triumphally vindicated. Thus it will make its voice heard, and will at last have justice done to it.



M. ENCKELL said that he accepted the Council's decision.

The PRESIDENT noted the declarations which had been made.


M. HYMANS proposed that the conversation between the Representatives of Sweden and Finland and himself should begin on the day following, in order to find a common ground of agreement regarding the guarantees.

M. BRANTING thought that in view of what had happened at this meeting there was little chance that the meeting between the two parties under the presidency of M. HYMANS would have any result. In that event, the Council would pronounce its judgement in accordance with the terms of the Resolution which it had adopted.

Mr. FISHER asked M. Branting if the Swedish Government accepted, under protest, the Council's  resolution.

M. BRANTING stated that the Representatives of Sweden had already replied to that question on the day before when they had said, in the name of their Government, that it was ready loyally to recognise that the decision of the Council had the force given to it by the Covenant. This sentence would also be found in the protest of the Swedish Government, which had just been read.

M. VAN HAMEL, Director of the Legal Section of the Secretariat, was asked to make certain observations on the legal aspects of the question.

M. HANOTAUX desired that a discussion should not take place, at present, on the legal aspect, which was not teat ready to be discussed. A result had already been reached, and the Representatives of the parties in the dispute and M. Hymans would meet on the following day. The discussion on the legal aspect could be opened when the Council had received M. Hymans's  report.

The Council adopted M. Hanotaux's  proposal.