



Press release

Cross-party committee launches federal popular initiative to preserve Swiss neutrality

On Tuesday November 8, 2022, a cross-party committee headed by National Councilor Walter Wobmann launched the neutrality initiative at a press conference in Bern. Together with other members of the committee, he explained the objective and the purpose of the initiative.

Why is the neutrality initiative needed?

During its first three hundred years, Swiss neutrality was primarily used to support domestic policy. By contrast over the last two hundred years, it has acted in the service of foreign policy. Switzerland did not invent neutrality, but it has given it a unique character in many respects. Switzerland's neutral status is fundamentally different from the neutrality of other states. Swiss neutrality is armed and permanent. It does not involve the membership of any alliances. In neutral Switzerland, defense or military alliances with other states are not permitted. Swiss neutrality is freely chosen and has not been imposed by foreign powers. In the 1815 Treaty of Paris, neutrality lasting several centuries was reconfirmed at the request of the Swiss. Finally, Swiss neutrality was integral, at least until recently, and all-embracing. As a result of our armed neutrality, we emerged largely unscathed from two dreadful world wars.

The concept of "cooperative neutrality" recently invented by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, which is accompanied by the unconditional adoption of EU sanctions, is the regrettable result of these developments. They have brought an end to Swiss neutrality as the world has known it up until this point.

If the political elite loses its bearings, the electorate must put it back on the correct course. The neutrality initiative indicates the way back to permanent, comprehensive, armed neutrality for Switzerland.

The fundamental requirements of the initiative

- "Swiss neutrality" must be preserved.
- "Swiss neutrality" must apply permanently and without exception.
- "Swiss neutrality" must be armed and must include an army that is capable of defending the country and its people in case of attack.
- Switzerland must not become a member of any military or defense alliance. The only exception is in the event of a direct military attack against Switzerland.
- Switzerland must not become involved in military conflicts and must not take non-military coercive measures, in other words, "sanctions" against the warring states.
- Switzerland will use its permanent neutrality for good offices with the aim of preventing and resolving conflicts.

With its neutral stance, Switzerland is the unconditional advocate of peace throughout the world, working to ensure that people in conflict regions are freed from the risk of violence. Swiss neutrality is of service to all the countries in the world.

JA

ZUR SCHWEIZER NEUTRALITÄT



DIE NEUTRALITÄTSINITIATIVE

- Freiheit und Selbstbestimmung sichern
- Sicherheit, Frieden und Wohlstand bewahren
- Gute bilaterale Beziehungen zu allen Staaten pflegen

> neutralitaet-ja.ch

«Wahrung der schweizerischen Neutralität (Neutralitätsinitiative)»

Initiativkomitee

Das Initiativkomitee, bestehend aus nachstehenden Urheberinnen und Urheber, ist berechtigt, diese Volksinitiative mit absoluter Mehrheit seiner noch stimmberechtigten Mitglieder zurückzuziehen:

PRÄSIDENT

Wobmann Walter, Sagigass 9, 5014 Gretzenbach

MITGLIEDER

Aeschi Thomas, Mühlebachstrasse 5b, 6340 Baar; Bieri Hans, Grossackerstrasse 7, 8135 Langnau a.A.; Bignasca Danzi Antonella, Via San Francesco 5, 6948 Porza; Blatter Joseph, Zollikerstrasse 203b, 8008 Zürich; Buob Matthias, Haufflandweg 1, 8605 Gutenswil; Eckstein Markus, Klosterstrasse 16, 9403 Goldau; Eleganti Emanuel, Hofstrasse 20a, 8730 Uznach; Ender Josef, Rubiswilstrasse 19, 6438 Ibach; Faber Marc, 23/3 SOI 4 Lamphoon Road, Ampur Muang, 50000 Chiang Mai, Thailand; Gantner Alex, Staubergasse 9, 8124 Maur; Gartenmann Stephanie, Kupfergasse 15, 3800 Matten b.I.; Haller Rolf, Veilchenweg 608, 5732 Zetzwil; Kämpfer Jürg, Aryanastrasse 41, 8704 Herrliberg; Landmann Valentin, Möhrlistrasse 97, 8006 Zürich; Millius Stefan, Hauptgasse 46, 9050 Appenzell; Minder Thomas, Rheinstrasse 84, 8212 Neuhausen am Rheinfall; Mrakic Mihajlo, Sennhüttenstrasse 59, 8716 Schmerikon; Page Pierre-André, Chemin de la Grange-des-Bois 5, 1553 Châtonnaye; Quadri Lorenzo, Via San Gottardo 20A, 6900 Lugano; Rietiker Stephan, Obere Rebhalde 29, 6340 Baar; Roca René, Rüslerstrasse 37, 5452 Oberrohrdorf; Ruch Peter, Kelmattstrasse 14, 6403 Küssnacht; Sager-Koenig Florence, Chemin de la Condémine 3A, 1272 Genolier; Vogelsanger David, Baarerstrasse 3, 8926 Kappel am Albis; Vogt Hans-Ueli, Turbinenstrasse 60, 8005 Zürich; Wüthrich Marianne, Kienbergerstrasse 22, 9500 Wil SG

Eidgenössische Volksinitiative

«Wahrung der schweizerischen Neutralität (Neutralitätsinitiative)»

Die Bundesverfassung wird wie folgt geändert:

Art. 54a Schweizerische Neutralität

- 1 Die Schweiz ist neutral. Ihre Neutralität ist immerwährend und bewaffnet.
- 2 Die Schweiz tritt keinem Militär- oder Verteidigungsbündnis bei. Vorbehalten ist eine Zusammenarbeit mit solchen Bündnissen für den Fall eines direkten militärischen Angriffs auf die Schweiz oder für den Fall von Handlungen zur Vorbereitung eines solchen Angriffs.

- 3 Die Schweiz beteiligt sich nicht an militärischen Auseinandersetzungen zwischen Drittstaaten und trifft auch keine nichtmilitärischen Zwangsmassnahmen gegen kriegführende Staaten. Vorbehalten sind Verpflichtungen gegenüber der Organisation der Vereinten Nationen (UNO) sowie Massnahmen zur Verhinderung der Umgehung von nichtmilitärischen Zwangsmassnahmen anderer Staaten.
- 4 Die Schweiz nutzt ihre immerwährende Neutralität für die Verhinderung und Lösung von Konflikten und steht als Vermittlerin zur Verfügung.

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HIER INITIATIVE UNTERZEICHNEN

Auf dieser Liste können nur **Stimmberechtigte unterzeichnen, die in der genannten politischen Gemeinde in eidgenössischen Angelegenheiten stimmberechtigt** sind. Bürgerinnen und Bürger, die das Begehren unterstützen, mögen es handschriftlich unterzeichnen.

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Bitte sofort vollständig oder teilweise ausgefüllt bis am 22.04.2024 an Neutralitätsinitiative, Postfach 54, 8416 Flaach einsenden.

Mehr Informationen oder Bestellung bzw. Herunterladen von Bogen: www.neutralitaet-ja.ch

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Die unten stehende Stimmrechtsbescheinigung wird durch das Initiativkomitee eingeholt.

Die unterzeichnete Amtsperson beschwört hiermit, dass oben stehende _____ (Anzahl) Unterzeichnerinnen und Unterzeichner der Volksinitiative in eidgenössischen Angelegenheiten stimmberechtigt sind und ihre politischen Rechten in der erwähnten Gemeinde ausüben.

Amtsstempel

Ort: _____ Die zur Bescheinigung zuständige Amtsperson:

Datum: _____ Amtliche Eigenschaft: _____ Eigenhändige Unterschrift: _____



Walter Wobmann

What is the aim of the initiative? (Text of the initiative)

The Federal Constitution will be amended as follows:

Art. 54a Swiss neutrality

¹ *Switzerland is neutral. Its neutrality is permanent and armed.*

² *Switzerland does not join any military or defense alliances. The exception is the cooperation with these alliances in the event of a direct military attack on Switzerland or of preparations for an attack of this kind.*

³ *Switzerland does not take part in military conflicts between third countries and does not impose non-military sanctions on warring states. The exceptions are obligations to the United Nations (UN) and measures to prevent the circumvention of non-military sanctions by other states.*

⁴ *Switzerland makes use of its permanent neutrality to prevent and resolve conflicts. It acts as a mediator.*

"Swiss neutrality" - a beacon for the world

Swiss neutrality is the white spot on the map: a location recognized by everyone where the parties in a conflict can meet and talk away from the fighting. As long as Switzerland remains neutral, there is a chance of peace.

The neutrality initiative is the response of the Swiss people to the indecisive politicians in Bern who are suffering from neutrality fatigue.

Why do we need the neutrality initiative?

During its first three hundred years, Swiss neutrality was primarily used to support domestic policy. By contrast over the last two hundred years, it has acted in the service of foreign policy. Switzerland did not invent neutrality, but it has given it a unique character in many respects. Switzerland's neutral status is fundamentally different from the neutrality of other states. Swiss neutrality is armed and permanent. It does not involve the membership of any alliances. In neutral Switzerland, defense or military alliances with other states are not permitted. Swiss neutrality is freely chosen and has not been imposed by foreign powers. In the 1815 Treaty of Paris, neutrality lasting several centuries was reconfirmed at the request of the Swiss.

Finally, Swiss neutrality was integral, at least until recently, and complete. As a result of our armed neutrality, we emerged largely unscathed from two dreadful world wars.

But today Swiss politics consists increasingly of soundbites that simply repeat what is currently being said on the international stage. This involves merely singing along with the chorus of untruths and hypocrisy, adopting a scapegoat mentality and making complacent distinctions between "good" and "evil." As a result, we are alienating other countries, antagonizing our trading partners and even making enemies.

The concept of "cooperative neutrality" recently invented by Ignazio Cassis (FDP), the President of the Swiss Confederation, which is accompanied by the unconditional adoption of EU sanctions, is the regrettable result of these developments. Joe Biden, Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelenskyy recently stated publicly: "Switzerland is no longer neutral."

The neutrality initiative is essential to prevent the independence and neutrality of Switzerland from being undermined by an ideologized, hypocritical foreign policy.

Switzerland needs its neutrality and the world needs a neutral Switzerland!

Florence Sager-Koenig

Presentation of the federal popular initiative “Safeguarding Swiss neutrality (initiative on neutrality)”

Why do we need an initiative on neutrality, given that the current Federal Constitution specifies in article 185, under the heading “External and internal security,” that “the Federal Council takes measures to safeguard [...] the neutrality of Switzerland”?

To answer this question, I will briefly describe the specific features of Swiss neutrality and then highlight some recent essential facts. I will finish by presenting the text of the initiative.

A. What is Swiss neutrality?

- Swiss neutrality is the result of our history and our traditions.
- Swiss neutrality is a unique political concept that allows Switzerland to perform an important mediation role. On June 16, 2021, a historic crisis summit was held which was attended by President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart President Vladimir Putin. The role played by Switzerland was made possible by the country’s neutrality.
- Swiss neutrality is a tool for achieving national cohesion.
- Swiss neutrality is the means of creating a policy of peace, specifically in the form of Switzerland’s humanitarian role and the good offices of its diplomats.

B. A reminder of some recent facts

1. On February 24, 2022, the invasion of Ukraine (an independent country) by Russia (a nuclear power) began.
2. Following the invasion of Ukraine, the Federal Council took the immediate and justified decision to preserve our neutrality and to abstain from taking any non-coercive military measures against Russia, while preventing the circumvention of the economic sanctions imposed by other states.
3. In the space of less than a week, the Federal Council changed its position, following internal and international pressure and calls for it to fall into line with European sanctions.
4. On February 28, 2022, the Federal Council decided to “re-adopt” European Union (EU) sanctions against Russia.

The entire world – or at least almost all of it – has acknowledged with surprise that Switzerland is no longer neutral, which compromises its important peacekeeping and mediation role.

These sanctions consist primarily of financial measures, such as freezing the assets and economic resources of people and businesses, some of which do not have direct links with the Russian government.

The sanctions represent a serious violation of a large number of the principles of the rule of law

They are not helping to resolve the situation. On the contrary, they are pouring fuel on the fire and causing additional injustices.

This is not the goal of a policy of neutrality.

5. Content of the 8th package of sanctions adopted by the EU on October 5, 2022

The 8th package of sanctions adopted by the EU at the beginning of October includes in particular a ban on providing legal advisory services to legal persons, entities or bodies established in Russia.¹

Are we aware of the impact that measures of this kind will have on civilians, many of whom have no links with the Russian government?

Are we aware that the re-adoption of sanctions and our acknowledgment of NATO are undermining our neutrality? It is time for us to formally define our neutrality in the Federal Constitution. This is what the initiative is proposing.

The aims of the federal popular initiative "Safeguarding Swiss neutrality" (initiative on neutrality) are as follows:

- "Swiss neutrality" must be preserved.

The initiative wants legislators to specify in the Federal Constitution the limits on what the Federal Council and the Parliament have the right to do. The current provisions of the Constitution are obviously inadequate.

- "Swiss neutrality" must apply permanently and without exception.
- "Swiss neutrality" must be armed. Switzerland must have an army that is capable of defending the country and its people in the event of an attack.
- Switzerland must not become a member of any military or defense alliance. (The only exception is in the event of a direct military attack against Switzerland.)

If we do this, we will no longer be neutral. We will become a warring party, in other words, a party to the conflict. One example is NATO.

The vast majority of the Swiss population is in favor of neutrality. However, we hear politicians saying: "Yes, we support neutrality and we are not in favor of membership of NATO, but of increased cooperation." There are important contradictions here.

- Switzerland must not become involved in military conflicts between third parties.
- Switzerland is opposed to non-military coercive measures, in other words "sanctions," against the warring states.

These sanctions are measures of war.

If our government takes coercive measures against a warring country, Switzerland will lose its credibility as a mediator.

- Switzerland will continue to honor its commitments to the United Nations.
- Switzerland will introduce the necessary provisions to ensure that other countries cannot circumvent the non-military coercive measures via Switzerland and that Switzerland itself does not benefit from them.

¹ Article 12 of Council Regulation 2022/1904 amending Article 5n of [Regulation 833/2014](#).

- Switzerland wants to be credible and respected by all the countries of the world as a stable and reliable state.
- Switzerland uses its permanent neutrality for good offices with the aim of preventing and resolving conflicts.

*It is Switzerland's unique neutrality which gives it this special strength.
The mediation measures taken by a country depend on its political credibility in the eyes of the parties involved in the mediation.*

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen,
Switzerland should not give up an instrument as precious as its neutrality.
As long as Switzerland remains neutral, there will be a better chance of peace (in the world).
Thank you for listening.

Swiss neutrality - a high-caliber project for peace

Once again Swiss neutrality is being subjected to considerable pressure. The last time that this happened was in the early 1990s, after the end of the Cold War. At the time, the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama had proclaimed the “end of history.” He was referring to Hegel’s [philosophy of history](#), which actually leads to an end in the sense of a final synthesis, where, according to Fukuyama, there would be no more global political conflicts, but only peace and democracy. Fukuyama first published his thesis in the summer of 1989 and was proved wrong in January 1991, when a coalition of countries led by the USA started the First Gulf War. At this point, Switzerland moved away from its policy of integral neutrality and joined in the economic sanctions against Iraq. Since then, Switzerland has adopted a policy of differential neutrality. In the meantime, the USA has been almost permanently at war. Now, against the background of the war in Ukraine, Swiss neutrality is once again the focus of global politics and runs the risk of becoming completely meaningless.

Maintaining peace at home and abroad

Neutrality ultimately means that a state does not take part in a war between other states. Switzerland has been neutral since the early modern era and played a significant role in defining the meaning of neutrality.

The growth of the Swiss Confederation from 1291 onward led to historic experiences among the alliance of cantons, such as “sitting quietly” and mediation, both of which promoted peaceful cohabitation and constructive cooperation. These experiences gradually grew in importance in a foreign policy context and finally led to the first official declaration of neutrality by the Federal Diet parliament in 1674.

However, many of the questions about neutrality remained unresolved, because the concept of international law had not been defined until the 17th century, primarily by Hugo Grotius and Emer de Vattel, a representative of the Swiss-Romande school of natural law. For example, the mercenaries that Switzerland was famous for did not promote a foreign policy based on trust. Despite this, the declaration of neutrality increasingly brought about the unity that Switzerland was working toward. After the recognition of its sovereignty in the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the country, which was divided along denominational lines, was able to develop relatively independently.

The Congress of Vienna in 1815 brings permanent neutrality

Between 1798 and 1815, Switzerland was no longer a neutral sovereign country and soon became a theater of war. Following the fall of Napoleon I, a delegation of Swiss citizens traveled to the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815). Switzerland for the first time achieved official recognition under international law of its permanent neutrality and territorial integrity, despite this being disputed. This international commitment, which still applies today, was the result of a determination to bring about a kind of “balance” in Europe. However, it was explicitly requested by Switzerland and not “graciously granted” to it, as is frequently claimed.

After the Swiss Civil War, the federal state of Switzerland was founded in 1848 and its neutrality was consolidated, despite the fact that the fathers of the constitution did not explicitly include this in the purpose article of the Federal Constitution.

Swiss neutrality was enormously important over the decades that followed, because it allowed Switzerland, a multicultural country with several languages, to assert itself during the formation of nation states in Europe (particularly Italy and Germany). At the time, Switzerland was the only republic in a "sea of European monarchies" and was therefore at risk. However, it remained active in the field of peace policy, instigated a protecting power mandate for the first time and independently developed arbitration procedures for the peaceful resolution of disputes. The establishment of the Red Cross and the first Geneva Convention in 1864 laid the foundations for Switzerland's lasting humanitarian commitment, which it was able to make with credibility, not least because of its neutrality.

The two world wars as a practical test

The Hague Convention of 1907 established the right to neutrality, among other things. Since then Switzerland has been constantly readjusting its neutrality policy in the maelstrom of world history, but has had to ensure that the predictability and credibility of its permanent armed neutrality was guaranteed.

From an overall perspective, the First World War reinforced the integrational effect of neutrality and led to stronger internal cohesion, which at the start of the war had been very weak. Switzerland's entry into the League of Nations in 1920 fundamentally changed its neutrality policy. The country was exempted from taking part in military measures, but not from imposing economic sanctions. Switzerland's neutrality was redefined as being "differential." But soon the rise of totalitarian regimes resulted in Switzerland returning to "integral neutrality" in 1938, which absolved it from the obligation to impose economic sanctions.

In the Second World War, Switzerland was surrounded by totalitarian powers from 1940 onward and its existence was under threat. The reality of the war clearly demonstrated that it was not always possible to comply with the law of neutrality or to follow a considered neutrality policy. However, at no point did Switzerland call into question its humanitarian commitment or Good Offices, which it had never made such intensive use of.

The Cold War and the subsequent erosion of neutrality

Not long after the war, neutrality once again became highly valued in the bloc system that developed during the Cold War. For example, the Non-Aligned Movement advocated for peace and disarmament, and this came to a head in 1975 during the final part of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, since 1995 OSCE) where Switzerland had played a decisive role. This conference, which covered both the Eastern and the Western bloc and involved 35 states including the USA, Canada, the Soviet Union and almost all the European countries, confirmed "the right to neutrality" for all the participants. The process of détente finally succeeded in bringing an end to the Cold War.

For reasons of neutrality, the Swiss kept the United Nations (UN) at arm's length. Switzerland finally joined the Council of Europe in 1963 and laid the foundations for the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1960, an economic alliance that, unlike the European Community (now the EU), is not supranational in nature. In the context of its foreign policy maxim of "neutrality and solidarity," Switzerland increased its Good Offices (in Cuba and Iran for example) and frequently initiated and organized important disarmament and peace conferences on neutral soil.

As mentioned earlier, after the end of the Cold War, Switzerland returned to a policy of differential neutrality. This version of neutrality continued during the Bosnian war of 1995, NATO's illegal war of aggression against Serbia in 1999 and also the Iraq war of 2003.

However, Switzerland provided humanitarian aid in the areas affected by each of these conflicts. In 2002, Switzerland joined the UN and attempted to preserve its neutrality by means of a separate declaration. Switzerland has been part of the NATO Partnership for Peace since 1996, which is extremely tricky in terms of neutrality and takes Switzerland into a gray area of neutrality law.

Neutrality accompanied by an active peace policy

To prevent this erosion and give neutrality back its meaning, Switzerland must return to integral neutrality. Swiss neutrality has an enormously important role to play in times of peace and of war, because as the Swiss historian Wolfgang von Wartburg wrote: "There must be *one* place in the world that is *exclusively dedicated to peace*." This is the only way that the ICRC and the Good Offices can make a full impact. Otherwise, their credibility will be restricted even further at the expense of the many civilians caught up in conflicts around the world.

Maintaining credible neutrality in the face of parties to conflicts and warring states requires the economy to continue with normal business activity and the prevention of transactions that attempt to circumvent sanctions.

Committed to an ethos of "sitting quietly" and mediating between warring parties, Switzerland remains a role model for other states - for example as it was for Austria in 1955 - and, with its commitment to neutrality, it can help nations to live together without resorting to conflict.

Stephanie Gartenmann

In support of a secure, free, humanitarian and cosmopolitan Switzerland

Neutrality does not inevitably mean indifference, said German historian and theologian Otto Weiss. The political elite, which is forcing its way onto the international stage, is opposed to neutrality, claiming that it is cowardly, unappetizing, no longer relevant and incompatible with European values. My generation is living through times which we thought had been permanently relegated to the past. A brutal war is being fought in Europe just a few hours by plane from here. The proximity of this war has deeply shocked my generation and galvanized people of my age into action. But we must not forget that wars are being waged in other regions. The Conflict Barometer of the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research lists 20 wars and 20 limited conflicts. These inevitably involve humanitarian disasters on an enormous scale. Therefore, Switzerland must be aware that its foreign policy and, in particular, its neutrality policy should not focus only on the war in Ukraine.

It is time for Switzerland to modify its role and to return to acting independently rather than blindly following other countries. Switzerland needs an independent foreign policy which has its roots in the country's history and has proved its effectiveness on the domestic and the international stage.

My generation has the courage to defend itself against warmongering. This is why I support this initiative. Switzerland has a long humanitarian tradition. It is a depositary state of the law of armed conflict and the home of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The second head office of the UN is based in Geneva, the first being in New York. All of this has not happened by chance. Switzerland has successfully helped parties in conflicts to find a solution. Many conflicts have been resolved on our soil. As a result of our neutrality, we have been successful in taking on a variety of protective mandates and have saved human lives. What was the actual effect of this policy? Protection for people, for the civilian population. That is exactly what neutrality does; it rescues people.

What other credible neutral player can help civilians and people wounded in war? Because of its neutrality, Switzerland can provide support for precisely these people either inside or outside their own country. I would like to repeat that if we are genuinely neutral, we can also play an active role in peace diplomacy. Peace treaties are needed, together with plans for post-war order. We are accepted by the parties involved because we have not adopted a specific position in the conflict.

The neutrality of the state is not neutrality of opinion. I totally condemn war crimes, but our role as citizens is fundamentally different from that of the state. The state must protect the interests of Switzerland and its population. What are the interests of Switzerland? Security, peace and freedom. Because of Switzerland's credible foreign policy based on Swiss neutrality, it can work toward these goals on an international level, including as a neutral member of the UN. However, this does not require Switzerland to sit on the UN Security Council, which makes decisions relating to war.

Switzerland is not a major political power or a global player. In addition, we have no geopolitical interests and, hopefully, that will remain unchanged in the future. Just imagine what would happen if this were to change. Switzerland would be dragged into wars, a lot of resources would be wasted and we would have blood on our hands.

In the past, our neutrality has led to our prosperity. Because of this consistent policy, I was able to grow up in peace, security and freedom. That is not something to be taken for granted. The young people of my generation do not want this to change.

I want a Switzerland that stands up for people and is not complicit in war crimes. It must help people in cases where no one else does and must continue with its niche policy of humanitarian aid and peace. And it can only achieve this with integral neutrality, not by being a puppet of the EU and the USA and supplying arms to Ukraine. This is why we need to define neutrality in the Constitution.

Dr. Matthias Buob (Lieutenant Colonel on the General Staff)

I would like to shed more light on the second paragraph of the text of the initiative. This states that Switzerland must not join any military or defense alliances. The exception to this principle is a direct military attack on Switzerland and the preparations for an attack of this kind.

Over recent weeks and months, many false reports about the neutrality initiative have been published. It has been said that the adoption of the initiative would make cooperation with other military partners - in particular NATO partners - impossible. Other commentators have said that interoperability would be put at risk.

Interoperability is a very impressive word that for many people is probably incomprehensible. A brief explanation: Interoperability means that the Swiss Armed Forces could work with other countries' armed forces without problems in the event of a conflict. To give a simple example, our radio systems would have to be compatible with those of our military partner in order to be interoperable. This would allow different military forces to communicate with one another if a conflict broke out. However, the specifically Swiss nature of our military equipment is more likely to cause a problem for interoperability than the neutrality initiative.

If the initiative is adopted the Swiss Parliament will continue to decide on whether the Swiss Armed Forces should cooperate with military partners or take part in peacekeeping missions in other countries. The neutrality initiative will not change this.

In relation to the Swiss Armed Forces, the aims of the neutrality initiative are:

- On the one hand, to prevent Switzerland from entering into a relationship of direct or indirect dependency on other military or alliance partners which could involve explicit or implicit obligations.
- On the other hand to ensure that the Swiss Armed Forces remain in a position to perform their key defensive role independently and professionally using state-of-the-art equipment and systems. To achieve this the armed forces, for example the Air Force and the special forces, will, of course, need to take part in exercises with foreign partners.

Therefore, if the initiative is adopted it will not lead to any additional restrictions on military cooperation in peacetime. This is very important to me from a personal perspective, because I am a serving general staff officer in the army.

Against this background, making the judgment that the initiative's understanding of neutrality is "ultra-orthodox and inflexible," as a former Federal Councilor did in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* newspaper on October 27, is incomprehensible and, more importantly, incorrect. The aim of the initiative is actually to clarify the understanding of neutrality in the Constitution. This is the understanding that has allowed us in previous conflicts to do justice to our humanitarian tradition and our role as a mediator.

Our conclusion on military cooperation is that in the future only the Swiss Parliament will decide on the cooperation of the Swiss Armed Forces with military partners and on peacekeeping missions in other countries. By "cooperation," we mean taking part in exercises with the aim of learning from one another. But an exercise is not an alliance or a military or political commitment. It is simply an opportunity to learn from one another.

Thank you.