

On Swiss neutrality

Yes to Swiss neutrality

**“Our state is not an institution of morality
but of the creation and preservation of law”**

by *Therese Schläpfer,* Hagenbuch ZH*



*Therese Schläpfer.
(Photo ma)*

In view of the latest developments in Europe, the preservation of our neutrality is enormously important. The war in Ukraine clearly shows this. Actually, the European civilian population would prefer peace, but some governments allow themselves to be put under pressure.

Switzerland, too, is increasingly caught in the maelstrom of partisanship. Politicians of different colours are endangering our neutrality, accepting that Switzerland could be drawn into a conflict and that our country could become a target.

The statement of the Foreign Department in the UN Security Council also shows that official Switzerland in Bern wants to have an active say in world politics and is increasingly bidding goodbye to Switzerland's tradition of neutrality.

We want and must preserve Switzerland's neutrality

Our country is increasingly exercising a policy of phrases that simply parrot what is customary internationally. It is a policy of joining the chorus of untruthfulness, hypocrisy, scapegoat mentality and the smug distinction between “good guys” and “bad guys”. We are no longer ourselves.

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Neutrality initiative

- Ensuring liberty and self-determination
- Preserving peace and prosperity
- Nurturing our relations with the whole world

Federal popular initiative 'Preserving Swiss neutrality (neutrality initiative)

The Constitution shall be amended as follows: Art. 54a Swiss neutrality

- 1 Switzerland is neutral. Its neutrality is perpetual and armed.
- 2 Switzerland shall not join any military or defensive alliance. Cooperation with such an alliance is reserved in the event of a direct military aggression against Switzerland or in the event of acts preparing for such an aggression.
- 3 Switzerland shall not take part in military conflicts between third states, nor shall it take non-military coercive measures against a belligerent state. Its obligations to the United Nations Organisation (UNO) and measures to prevent the circumvention of non-military coercive measures taken by other states are reserved.
- 4 Switzerland shall use its perpetual neutrality to prevent and resolve conflicts and shall make its services available as a mediator.

(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)

However, in doing so, we are alienating other countries, angering trading partners and even creating enmities.

Yet, neutrality is not only a peacemaker, but also our greatest asset. This is misjudged in domestic politics. For example, companies settle here because from Switzerland they have free access to all the markets. We can trade with everyone worldwide because we are seen as a reliable partner without political power claims.

The Federal Council and the parliament need a compass and a logbook again for this important state maxim.

It is time to enshrine neutrality in the constitution.

History of Swiss neutrality

For half a millennium, Switzerland has developed an amazing ability to find a niche for its national existence in the shadow of rival great powers. The neutrality of our small state has very little to do with ideology or idealism, but a great deal with the reality of life. If the older brother fights with a peer in the playground, the younger boy or sister with less physical strength will stay away from such confrontations for their own benefit. At best, they would get a bloody nose if they interfered.

Historically proven model of success

Based on historical experience, no one will seriously dispute that Swiss neutrality is a successful model. The alliance of the Confederates would hardly have survived its early beginnings if they had not decided on mutual "sitting still" and mediation in the event of a crisis.

Later, however, our confessionally, ethnically and culturally divided country would not have been able to survive without neutrality, during the religious wars and mergers of our neighbouring countries into large nation states.

In both world wars, neutral Switzerland succeeded in ensuring that the belligerent countries respected its borders – admittedly not without great defence efforts, which represented an enormous burden for the state as well as for its citizens.

Special aspects of Swiss neutrality

In the first three centuries, Swiss neutrality was primarily in the service of domestic policy, whereas in the last two centuries it was in the service of foreign policy.

Switzerland did not invent neutrality, but in various respects gave it a very distinctive character. Its neutrality status differs fundamentally from the neutrality of other states.

Swiss neutrality is "perpetual". The tradition of Swiss neutrality can only retain its effect on other nations if it continues without interruptions and its presence is renewed and intact on every occasion.

Swiss neutrality is "armed". Our country has committed itself to military defence and must guarantee that no violence emanates from its territory at all times.

Swiss neutrality is "freely chosen" and not the result of a diktat by foreign powers. It was the *1815 Act of Paris* that reaffirmed a centuries-old practice at Switzerland's request.

And finally, at least until recently, Swiss neutrality was "integral", i.e. in full. In the interwar period, our country temporarily participated in economic sanctions of the international community by joining the League of Nations. In the 20th century, however, the general principle for economic cooperation with crisis regions was to maintain the volume of trade at the level of previous years. In the early 1990s, Switzerland participated in international economic sanctions for the first time. Strangely enough, these had been little questioned in our country.

Neutrality is peace policy

All current surveys prove it: more than 90 per cent of the Swiss view our neutrality positively and feel that it gives our small state a strong sense of identity.

Nevertheless, numerous leading personalities in politics, culture and society want to break with the destiny of our neutral small state. They long for visions and spectacular deeds.

Certainly, neutrality limits our government's room for manoeuvre and foreign policy activities. Neutrality hardly grants them heroic deeds and rarely glamorous international appearances.

Neutrality saves us from surrendering to unguarded emotions, from rash belligerence and from not taking cruelty and violence serious.

Neutrality is more than non-participation in conflicts. It means voluntarily renouncing external power politics. Seen in this light, Swiss neutrality certainly has the positive content of a fundamental peace policy.

Switzerland applies the principle of peace, on which it is based, also to its relations with other

states and peoples. Every state that stays out of fighting makes our world a little more peaceful.

The performance of “good offices” is by no means the privilege of the neutral. However, experience has shown that the recipients of services have a special trust in the impartial neutral country, who consciously refrains from power politics and has a long experience of services. Conversely, the neutral country also has an interest in not letting its non-involvement in the conflicts of this world appear as shirking or “dodging the fare” and thus compensate for its neutrality-related restraint:

This accusation of Switzerland of national egoism should be invalidated according to objective criteria such as granting asylum to genuine refugees, the Red Cross, disaster relief, the exercise of protective power mandates, Switzerland as a location for international organisations.

Neutrality guarantees freedom of expression

Our neutrality is not an end in itself or just customary. Rather, it ensures our independence – in addition to political freedom and above all the intellectual and moral freedom of independent judgement. Our state is not an institution of morality, but of the creation and preservation of law.

To form and realise ideals is the case for people, families, churches, associations, but never for the state. Political neutrality has not least the purpose of guaranteeing the independence of our judgement. The state does not have the right to determine a certain moral line for the citizens. The increasingly frequent moralising statements from Federal Bern on all kinds of international problems are questionable and unacceptable. As Swiss citizens we oblige the government, diplomacy and administration to “sit still” and refrain from speaking in our name where they should remain silent.

New meaning for neutrality

In the recent past, attempts were made with enormous optimism to organise this world by multinational organisations and institutions. In the process many regarded neutrality as an obsolete relic and isolationist shackles. It is true that the reputation of Swiss neutrality among the world powers, which was somewhat in doubt after the Second World War, could be restored for the time being through the perform-

ance of good offices. In the course of the European integration, however, our state maxim is once again questioned.

Our tiny neutral country has often been pressurized by claims to power from outside. Today, it is not so much an aggressive power but an overly loud and moralistic ideology on a larger scale challenging us.

Failed attempts to abandon neutrality (differential/active/cooperative/flexible)

In 1917, the liberal Federal Councillor *Arthur Hoffmann*, with the help of SP politician *Robert Grimm*, tried to obtain a separate peace agreement from Russia and Germany. When this became known among the states of the Entente, the war-deciding coalition of France, England and Russia in the First World War, a serious diplomatic neutrality crisis ensued, forcing Hoffmann to resign.

The Catholic conservative foreign minister *Giuseppe Motta* led Switzerland into the League of Nations by means of a fiercely contested referendum in 1920. This was associated with a “differential neutrality”, which led the country to support economic sanctions, but not military interventions. After the occupation of Abyssinia by Italy, which would have entailed dangerous sanctions against the fascist neighbour to the south, the Federal Council was able to return Switzerland to the form of integral neutrality in 1938.

The term “active neutrality” is a contradiction in terms: neutrality is in fact always a passive stance.

The tried and tested Swiss “diplomacy as a model” is increasingly being supplanted by a “diplomacy of the raised index finger”. The results of this “activism” are not confidence-building.

Recently – invented by foreign minister *Ignazio Cassis* (FDP) – a “cooperative neutrality” with unconditional acceptance of EU and US sanctions has been added. Is the starvation of a people actually a more humane means of violence than the use of weapons? Why do we expect our fellow men affected by a war of famine and job loss to still judge Switzerland as being neutral when participating at the same time?

An unfortunate result of this was that the American, Russian and Ukrainian presidents publicly stated that Switzerland had turned its back on neutrality.

Neutrality fatigue – which in retrospect could always be curbed in the name of the good of the country – has now entered official Swiss politics.

The world needs Swiss neutrality

Neutrality means not starting and not participating in wars – including economic wars – unless one is attacked oneself.

Surrendering “unrestricted”, “absolute” neutrality would plunge Switzerland into the middle of a maelstrom of conflicts and disputes.

Today, this statesmanlike wisdom is largely absent in the Federal Parliament. Neutrality requires strength and firmness. – Going along is more comfortable.

The neutral state distrusts any quick judgments, refuses to divide the world simply into good and bad. Of course, neutrality does not oblige the Swiss to keep their mouths shut and to be morally indifferent when it comes to the injustice of a war of aggression. However, it does

oblige the state, the Federal Council and also the Federal Assembly to show humility and restraint.

Swiss neutrality is the one white spot in the world, a universally recognised place where the parties to war and conflict can meet and talk to each other without weapons. As long as there is a neutral Switzerland, peace has a chance.

Neutrality is an indispensable political instrument.

We want to be the place in the world exclusively serving peace.

Neutrality is Switzerland’s seal of approval.

Switzerland needs its neutrality – the world needs a neutral Switzerland.

(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)

For more information and to obtain signature sheets for the popular initiative “Preservation of Swiss neutrality” click here: <https://www.neutralitaet-ja.ch>