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## **The Normative Construction of the Soldier in Switzerland: Constitutional Conditions and Public Political Discourse**

The Swiss Case

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## Introduction

In terms of its military system, Switzerland represents an odd case in present day comparison. At a time when more and more countries withdraw from maintaining conscription based armed forces, Switzerland continues to enforce compulsory military service for all male citizens. The maintenance of standing troops is prohibited in the constitution of the Swiss Federation. The military is organised in the fashion of a decentralised militia which is mobilised only for training. The militia systems shapes a mass reserve corps of a ‘nation in arms’ that is supplemented by a small number of professionals for stand-by, for the Swiss participation in out-of-area missions, and – foremost – for the instruction of the conscripts.

Also in terms of its membership in international organisations and in defence communities in particular, Switzerland follows a distinct policy: The Swiss defence concept is tied to a foreign policy of neutrality, and the country is therefore keeping an isolationist profile in all of those international organisations that aim at collaboration in their foreign policies. The Alpine country has for that reason neither become a member in NATO nor in the European Union.

Although this very clinging to a conscription based system might appear like a petrified tradition that remains unquestioned, Switzerland has in fact been debating over the country’s traditional defence and security concepts for the past decade. With the end of the Cold War and its changes in the security policies of both formerly divided political hemispheres, the Swiss notion of neutrality required to be rethought, and indeed it was. By the early 1990s, Switzerland saw itself placed in the midst of a Europe whose nations prepared to grow more and more into an enlarged federation across the lines of those borders which had formerly informed the anticipation of possible armed conflicts. The Swiss military sociologist Karl Haltiner put the puzzle that his country faced like this: “What direction is Switzerland to take in a situation, in which the surrounding environment becomes more and more like Switzerland?” (Haltiner 2003: 49).

Moreover, when more and more countries saw new types of conflict and threat scenarios replace the classical defence of the nation with multinational crisis management, and on international scale, Switzerland became also challenged to scrutinise the abstinent terms of its own foreign policy: The fact that Switzerland joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace in 1996 and became a member of the United Nations in the year 2002 marks the change. In the past years, Switzerland has sent military units into humanitarian UN missions, into peacekeeping missions of the OSCE, and the SWISSCOY unit takes part in NATO’s KFOR mission in Kosovo. All of these activities, are, however, not grounded on formal membership but on close bilateral relationships. In spite of the rather tentative character of this outward commitment, the Swiss armed forces have undergone a change in their scopes and functions over the past years. Although the

respective shifts may seem to be of a minor sort when compared with, e.g. the reconstruction of the German *Bundeswehr* from an army of deterrence to a globally deployable one, they are markers of a fundamental controversy over the desirable role and the legitimate assignments of the Swiss Armed Forces.

In order to present the characteristic features of the normative image of the soldier as it is constructed in Swiss society, a first part of the paper recalls briefly the history of the Swiss militia model so as to contextualise this peculiar form of conscription and to trace its rationale. Information on the structural organisation of the Swiss Armed Forces is compiled in a second part, and respectively on the constitutional regulations in a third part. The fourth section of my paper is devoted to the ongoing debate on the question which tasks the Swiss Armed Forces are to fulfil and whether and how the Swiss military needs to be changed to meet the respective demands. In the frame of the Swiss direct democracy, the public policy discourse makes itself heard in parliamentary debates and decisions, in plebiscitary polls and the attempts to mobilise for such plebiscitary decisions. My report draws on crucial stances from these contentious debates which continue to occupy the Swiss public and political institutions.

## 1. Historical Roots and Traditional Rationale of Conscription in Switzerland

### **Military Service as Civic Duty to the *Res Publica***

Four peculiarities have come to dominate the political and military culture of Switzerland over the time of centuries with a relatively coherent trend. All four enforced each other and have thus become an essential part of the Swiss political culture and identity as a whole (see Haltiner 2003: 43 ff):

1. The decentralised form of federal state organisation
2. Direct, plebiscitary republicanism
3. Independent foreign policy that eventually turned into neutrality
4. The militia concept of citizen-soldiers who embody the identity of the civil constituency with the electorate's obligation to defence.

Haltiner stresses that it is the particular dominance of egalitarianism in the country's political history which paved the way for the 'hardcore version' of conscription, i.e. the classic militia army. The high esteem of egalitarian solutions has, according to this reading, over time rendered it almost sacrosanct a tradition and made it become a core feature of collective Swiss identity:

“The egalitarian nature of the cooperative past led to a traditional distrust of a professional caste of officers and of professionalisation of the forces in general (...) The historical succession of vassalage, knight forces and mercenary forces

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that is to be observed in other European countries is unknown to Switzerland.” (Haltiner 2003: 46)

Unlike in other European states, the Swiss military system did not develop out of an existing national state frame. The Swiss federation came into being neither as a result from warfare against neighbouring states; nor was there a necessity to abolish an autocratic rule system for self-determination. Decentralised self-government structures were already there when the federal ties became initiated to safeguard protection of the local independencies. The decision to have joint military forces was thus the starting point of a nation-building process rather than consequence of any already existing nation-state. The Swiss case is therefore a curious example for the argument which both Avant (2000) and Østergaard (1999) make, to wit that the driving forces to install a system of conscription should be seen on the nation-building side with the goal of shaping a collective identity by the democratization of the guarding tasks for the polity; military efficiency proper would in general require different forms of recruitment and could thus only be held for a side-issue when opting for conscription:

“(...) the purely military side of general conscription merely stood out as a side-effect in view of the real purpose, that is the welding together of a broad variety of subjects to nationals and likeminded citizens to a nation.” (Østergaard 1999: 42; cited from Joenniemi 2006: 6)

However, the parties to establish the federal ties in Switzerland were not aiming at the founding of a nation or a national state; on the contrary. They were merely interested in keeping local sovereignty as farthest as possible while being prepared also for defending this very autonomy. Like-mindedness on this issue laid the grounds for a nation of diverse communities that respect and defend each other’s peculiarities. The militia was a cost-effective solution and one that suited the interest-based history of the Swiss state-building process. Taken together, the key features of the civil-military relations in Switzerland and the historical circumstances out of which they developed make this country case a classical example in favour of Immanuel Kant’s theory of the Democratic Peace: The country maintains the most Kantian-type armed forces, and for the utilitarian reasons which the philosopher suggested as fueling the general peacefulness of democratically ruled polities (see Kant 1795: 197 f.).

Switzerland looks back on a history of being shaped mostly for pragmatic reasons of mutual benefit. Starting with an agreement of reciprocal protection and defence aid between the three original cantons Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, in the year 1291, it took until 1848 to found the federal Swiss state with its currently 26 cantons and semi-cantons.<sup>1</sup> The federal state developed gradually out of a loosely regulated union, the Old

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<sup>1</sup> The official German term for Switzerland is “Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft” which literally translates as the “Swiss oath fellowship” and refers to the “Rütlischwur” of 1291. An “Eidgenossenschaft” is a confederacy of equal partners who form a pact and seal it with an oath. Regarding the partners as equals – in contrast to the hierarchically organised oath of fealty in feudalism – is an essential characteristic of the union. The members may be united not by one single pact but by “several overlapping pacts and separate bilateral treaties between various members”. For further information see <http://en.wikipedia.org>.

Swiss Confederation, which increased the internal bonds of cooperation over time and established a growing number of functional organizational ties. With strong rural communities there was a notable appreciation of local self-government across the Old Confederation, and the high valuation of independence marked the “Swiss Confederation” just as much which came into being in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as a cooperative of 22 cantons with just a minimum set of common institutions. Although the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time of religious and political conflict in the region with some cantons fighting for a unified and centralised state, the strong inclination to a federalist sense of independence survived all of these forces on the long run. Both constitutions passed in the course of that century (1848 and 1874) kept to the principles of decentralisation, of subsidiarity, and of plebiscitary elements. Most public services, inclusive of the responsibility for military service, and the right to raise taxes were left in the sovereignty of the cantons at first. They would otherwise not have subscribed to adopting the federal constitution (for detailed accounts, see Callaghan/ Kernic 2001: 190 f.; Fahrni 1994).

In the same vein, the political concept of neutrality proved to be the most beneficial for the cooperation to work. It suggested itself as a logical consequence of the decentralised structure the federation had shaped, with subsidiarity and far-reaching self-government rights of strong – and topographically secluded – communities: In the decided absence – and practical impossibility – of a centralised foreign policy, the autonomous rights of local actors to follow their own agenda in foreign affairs almost necessarily developed into the need *to refrain* from doing so if they did not want to put at risk the agreed collaboration within the federation. The pressure to refrain from activities in the foreign policy realm was even greater in view of the lingual, cultural and confessional diversity of the Swiss cantons to form the federation:

“In a nation divided by confessional and cultural differences (...), neutrality (...) served as an agent of national cohesion. It prevented ethnic groups from turning away from a domestic focus towards their cultural super-communities (e.g., the French Swiss towards France, the German Swiss towards the German Reich, the Italian Swiss towards Italy). (...) Neutrality has over time become an aspect of national identification (symbolically represented in the Red Cross) and is supported by a stable 80 per cent of the Swiss population.” (Haltiner 2003: 44)

The ideal of the citizen-soldier whose task is restricted to home-defence as it is another typical feature of the Swiss tradition is directly linked with this history. After all, the risk of particular groups or whole cantons turning their attention and loyalty away from a comprehensive Swiss focus was not merely an issue of cultural politics: The quoted “cultural super-communities” whether France, the German Reich, or Italy, were the big players in 19<sup>th</sup> century European power politics, and neutrality in foreign affairs became a strategy to counter the danger of being wiped out from the map and absorbed by the neighbouring states. The inner diversity of Switzerland still is a major argument brought forward in favour of keeping the neutrality today. Public opinion has, however, started to become divided over the issue of neutrality as such. It is foremost the older and more conservative, traditionalist and rural Swiss population who displays a strong identification with the principle of neutrality while the younger population from urban

environments tends to approve of an enforced opening of Swiss foreign policy for extended international collaboration and military engagement abroad (see *ibid.*, fourth section of this paper and Bühlmann/Sager/Vatter 2006: 65 f.).

Initially, the domestic organization of defence in the Federation posed some difficulties. As long as the cantons and their populace refused to transfer sovereignty over their military affairs to the federal level, collective security was kind of a virtual resource and had to be managed according to the principle of subsidiarity. In practice it meant that each canton took the training of soldiers in the own hands. The common federal constitution of 1848 introduced universal compulsory military service as the male citizens' duty to be implemented by each canton. The sum of these military units, set up and maintained by the cantons, was supposed to form a federal army for collective defence purposes if needed (see Callaghan/Kernic 2001: 190 f.).

The system was evidently prone to produce inconsistencies, i.e. different cantons handling the training of their conscripts quite differently. The resulting inadequacy in terms of actual defence capacities led to a reform only 26 years after the introduction of the general draft (see Luck 1985: 414 f): The constitution of 1874 prescribes universal conscription in Article 18, and it "prohibits for any central ruling power to hold a regular army-in-being (while at the same time allowing the cantons just that – up to a strength of 300 men – primarily for police tasks). Therefore not only the federation, but also every single canton has its own ministry of defence" up to the present time (Article 13; Haltiner 2003: 45). Police and civil defence are organised autonomously by the cantons up to the present, and the role of the federation is a subsidiary one.

Together with the anchoring of the militia system in the federal constitution, the system became reorganized in such a way in 1874 that the obligation to equip the conscripts with arms, the central command of the Swiss Armed Forces and all legal matters pertaining to the military were transferred to the central level of the Swiss federation. Despite minor adaptations, such as the much-contested introduction of an alternative civil service for conscientious objectors, or the opening of the Armed Forces for volunteering women in the year 1995 (MG 1995, Articles 3 and 26), the constitutional regulations have in their very substance been left untouched since the passing of the 1874 constitution. Accordingly, the respective act is regularly held for the core document which founded the Swiss military system:

"1874 may be considered the real starting point for universal military conscription (...). In combination with its neutrality, conscriptions became a key component of the political self-image of Switzerland. The political success of this Swiss defence strategy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century fostered the coalescence of national identity, neutrality, and the military. For more than a hundred years, neutrality and the concept of a comprehensive national defence system based on military conscription have played a key role in the country's security policy, both being deeply rooted in Swiss society." (Callaghan/Kernic 2001: 191 f.)

The Swiss concept of the citizen-soldier aims at the lowest possible degree of institutionalising military structures and at a maximum of immediate democratic control.

Neutrality, universal conscription and direct democracy are intertwined in this understanding. For the normative image of the soldier, the concept of the militia implies the immediate identification of democratic participation rights with the civic obligation to be prepared for defending the polity on equal share.

## 2. The Swiss Militia System: How it Works

Swiss conscription starts with enrolment of all able-bodied men at the age of 18. Women may volunteer. The Swiss militia calls its recruits to service then at the age of 20. The training start may be postponed in order to finish high school, but due to a reform enacted in 2005, it is no longer possible to postpone it so as to finish university. Conscripts have the right to apply for civilian instead of military service, but that choice has to be substantiated morally and is scrutinised and decided by a committee. Young men who are found eligible for military service but attest their physical or mental inability to serve the military must pay an additional 3% of income tax, and they must serve in an institution of civil protection like the Fire Department, or a medical help institution.

### Militia Training

Recruits have to absolve 260 days of service: three days for recruitment, a 124-145 days cycle of training (depending on the service branch) to be spent in a training camp of recruit school and 6 to 7 courses for recapitulation of training, each of which lasts for 19 days. Alternative to doing the recapitulation courses, the so called “single term conscripts” (*Durchdiener*) absolve their whole service at one time within 300 consecutive days. The Grenadiers, an elite infantry unit, are an exception in that they have to spend 25 weeks in boot camp training. A further exception is the members of Switzerland's new Special Forces unit AAD 10<sup>2</sup>, which is an elite all-volunteer professional unit. Their training lasts for 18 months. Upon release from the initial training, the soldiers keep parts of their equipment and their Sig 550 assault rifle to take it home, including 50 rounds of ammunition in a sealed box, to be opened upon alert. Other use or unsealing the ammunition box without being entitled to it by an alert is forbidden.

Both the recruit's basic training and his or her military specialisation as a soldier (initial training) are conveyed in the same training facility. At the end of these two phases of instruction the militia members are released as member of a militia unit with which they will stay for the duration of military obligation, i.e. until the age of 30 (or longer, if the military service is not yet completed), performing three weeks of training every year. For reaching the rank of a non-commissioned officer or higher one has to absolve more days of service voluntarily, for example 430 days to become a non-commissioned officer.

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2 AAD 10 = Armee Aufklärungs Detachement 10 / Armed Forces Recon Detachment 10.

These cadre ranks may be filled on a volunteer basis; however, soldiers may also be commanded to absolve the cadre career. Subaltern officers are obliged till the age of 36, for staff officers and higher ranks, obligation ends with the age of 50. The resulting available military manpower is split into different age-groups for different purposes in the militia.

Militia members can postpone their annual training weeks within certain time spans. Generally, however, men interrupt their regular work during these weeks to absolve their military service. They are paid 80% of their regular salary by the state during training weeks if their employer does not pay the full salary during service. If that is the case, the 80% amount is paid to the employer as compensation for the lost workforce. A law prevents employers from firing a person in military service.

## **Higher Cadres**

The highest rank to attain for a militia officer is that of a Brigadier General. In peace time, the Swiss Armed Forces have no Supreme Commander in the rank of a 4 star General. The General is only appointed by parliament in times of mobilisation. The highest ranking officer in times of peace is the socalled Chief of the Armed Forces (*Chef der Armee*) in the rank of a 3 star General.

Until 2004, officers in the Swiss Armed Forces were traditionally selected from the pool of non-commissioned officers upon their recapitulation courses. A first lieutenant or captain who desired to become a career officer had to attend an officer candidate school, which was (and – despite other changes – has remained to be) open to both, the militia officers who have a civilian job beside and the prospective employed officers. It entails a five months cycle of intensive training in small-unit and platoon-sized unit tactics. The next requirement was and still is the successful absolving of a one-year course at the military division of the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. The traditional system ensured that all officers had gone through the phase of a non-commissioned soldier. Altogether, it took two years to become an officer in this system. In 2004 the officer training was altered as a concession to the Swiss economy which was increasingly unhappy about having personnel away for so long, and about being forced to bear the extra-budgetary costs of the country's military structure (see Ecoffey 2000; Haltiner 2003: 56). In the new system, introduced with the reform package "Armed Forces XXI" in 2004, many future officers are selected during their initial training already and sent to officer training immediately after that. For one, this procedure reduces the time to train an officer. Secondly, since many young men have no employments yet at the time they enter the obligatory military instructions, the conflict of interest with employers is avoided largely. The traditional militia career strand exists still, but the new option is favoured during today's training of recruits.

To assure a high level of military leadership above the rank of first lieutenant, the Swiss Armed Forces maintain the Armed Forces College AFC (*Hoehere Kaderausbildung der Armee HKA*) which is responsible for several professionally run schools such as one for non-commissioned officers (*Berufsunteroffiziersschule der*

*Armee*), the military Academy (*Militärakademie*) which runs a bachelor degree programme for professional officers, programmes for company and battalion commanders, a number of staff courses, and the General Staff and Command College (*Generalstabsschule*), an elite training institution whose graduates are inducted into the General Staff Corps. 30 new trainees are selected per year for this purpose, but not all of them absolve the demanding training. Being a General Staff Officer is condition to occupy higher military functions like G3 (Chief of a Brigade's Operations) or J2 (Chief of Military Intelligence).

To complement the militia structure, the Swiss Armed Forces employ about 4,300 persons for military tasks. They are divided into the career military (*Berufsmilitär*, ca. 75 % of the employed soldiers) and soldiers who hold a fixed-term temporary contract of five years maximum (*Zeitmilitär*, ca. 25% of the employed soldiers). The employed military personnel serve in the Central Staff, in training and international peacekeeping missions. The proportion of professional towards militia officers is not equal: There are roughly 15.000 officers, and 700 of them are career officers. Many senior civil servants and business leaders in Switzerland are General Staff Officers. Until lately, prospective managers used to be urged even to qualify as officers by their companies, because the military occupation enjoyed high esteem not only as an indicator of commitment for the *res publica* but also in terms of promoting certain personal skills, e.g. in planning, logistics and personnel management.

## Facts and Figures on Resources of the Swiss Armed Forces

- 120,000 active members without recruits
- 20,000 recruits
- 80,000 reservists, regarded as fit for service within one year
- 3.5% of the Armed Forces personnel are employed as a recent innovation
- all functions in the Swiss Armed Forces are open for volunteering women; in 2005 there were 271 women among the 20,000 recruits.
- the portion of national defence declined over the last 25 years:
- 8.2 % of the overall budget were spent on defence in 1980, coming down to 3.7% in 2005 (equalling five billion Swiss Franks for national defence)
- the federal defence expenditure equals about 1.2% of the GDP in 2006

([www.bfs.admin.ch](http://www.bfs.admin.ch); [www.efv.admin.ch](http://www.efv.admin.ch);  
[www.vbs.admin.ch/internet/vbs/de/home/documentation/zahlen](http://www.vbs.admin.ch/internet/vbs/de/home/documentation/zahlen); accessed 22/5/2007)

### Service days of the Swiss military spent per year 2001-2006

Spent on:	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Civil Protection	56,081	151,873	375,007	282,164	323,777	339,976
Disaster Control	1,077	8,112	3,024	389	17,089	74
Support Missions	37,982	69,691	39,182	24,076	58,241	17,269
Peacekeeping Missions	71,075	74,366	88,469	92,876	97,827	101,012
Sa.:	166,215	304,042	505,682	399,505	496,934	458,331

([www.vtg.admin.ch/internet/groupgst/de/home/eins/einsatzbilanz0.html](http://www.vtg.admin.ch/internet/groupgst/de/home/eins/einsatzbilanz0.html))

Different conditions apply for militia members and for the employed military staff in respect of the training and stationing abroad: Employed military personnel are obliged to participate in missions out of the country, while militia members are not. The latest reform attempts (“Development Step 2008/2011”/ *Entwicklungsschritt 2008/2011*) which are currently under controversial discussion in Switzerland aim at a larger inclusion also of the militia system in Swiss out-of-area activities, and they were planned to be accompanied by changes in the legislation on the military (*MG/Militärgesetz*): The public hearing process that legislation acts undergo in Switzerland (*Vernehmlassungsverfahren*) revealed so much criticism, however, that the governmental plans are freezed right now. The novellation of the laws on the military is postponed and has been tied to the overall settling of the dispute over the reform act “Development Step 2008/2011” (*Entwicklungsschritt 2008/2011*). This one failed to find the parliamentary approval in October 2006. I shall come back to that later on.

Regarding the training and employment of Swiss soldiers, the proposed revision of the law on the military foresaw that militia members be also sent abroad for training purposes and during their regular recapitulation courses, and with an extended duration of six weeks instead of the currently four weeks. Furthermore is planned to make possible an employment of “single term conscripts” out of Switzerland, and the sending of Swiss soldiers shall be made altogether easier: Right now, the executive Federal Council (*Bundesrat*) may send soldiers into missions without having to get parliamentary approval

of it, if the decision affects troops of less than 100 army members and concerns a mission of up to three weeks only. The critical draft of the legal amendment entailed an extension of the Federal Council's competencies in terms of the time-span for employments: Without having to consult the Swiss parliament, the Council would then be entitled to send soldiers into peacekeeping and assistance missions of up to six months, yet only if they affect not more than 30 soldiers.

The general threshold for needing the parliament's vote on employing soldiers is suggested to be doubled from the current 2,000 to 4,000 (see Swiss info of 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2007; [www.swisspolitics.org/de/news](http://www.swisspolitics.org/de/news)). This pertains to utilising the armed forces for domestic security tasks such as the protection of the annual World Economic Forum in Davos. Because of the amount of criticism which the legal amendment proposal evoked, the Federal Council shall develop suggestions for revision of the plans and transfer them to parliamentary consultations in the course of the year 2007.

### 3. Post Cold-War Changes in the Constitutional Regulations and Task Allocations of the Swiss Armed Forces

As indicated above in reference of some changes that were introduced in the set-up of military training with the reform package "Armed Forces XXI", the Swiss military became re-organised in recent years. In view of the demise of the Iron Curtain, the traditional security and defence policies were profoundly questioned. The future of neutrality in particular and/or the political goals of the country with respect to its international impact, and the related consequences on the traditional set-up of the Swiss armed forces have remained objects of debate ever since.

By and large, the taken reforms fall into three waves: In between 1990 and the mid-1990s, the call for a peace-dividend that should follow the breakdown of the Soviet Empire – initiatives to abolish the Armed Forces in the Swiss case – effected a downsizing of the military structure and defence expenditures. Following that phase, the military tasks and goals became redefined in the second half of the 1990s: With the vanishing likelihood of the classical security threats, new strategic concepts were developed which foregrounded the military's deployability for crisis-management, for preventive and policing tasks at home and abroad. The scope of activities which the military may be called upon to fulfil has shifted in this phase to take on a higher proportion of tasks one may characterise as civilian tasks. According to the economising principle of making use of the militia structures also for the purpose of civil protection and disaster control, such a scope is not at all new to the Swiss system; but the 'civilian' profile became emphasised and enlarged. The third wave of reform which started in 2000/2001 aims at a restructuring of the armed forces in favour of their improved international interoperability. This means an adaptation to the modular concepts of NATO and the EU, and it entails a further shift away from the keeping of large numbers of manning; the end vision is rather to establish a smaller army and have more intensively trained soldiers to fulfil the genuinely military tasks (see Haltiner 2002).

The “Integrated and Modular Engagement system for the Swiss Soldier IMESS” is the related ‘future soldier’-programme of the Swiss Armed Forces. It started at the beginning of 2006 and will release soldiers for first trials in 2008.

## Redefining Neutrality

During the time of the Cold War, neutrality provided Switzerland with an internationally very prestigious status, and it procured indeed with special possibilities to exerting political influence (Altermatt 1992: 63 ff.). For instance, it allowed for taking on the role of the mediator on the international stage with particular credit.<sup>3</sup> The revolutions of 1989/90 changed the prerequisite conditions for the Swiss relations with countries in Eastern and Central Europe, raising the question whether the policy of neutrality could make any more sense in a more and more peaceful Europe that was given back the power to settle her internal affairs without the competition of two superpowers (see Luchsinger 1992).

Arguments against a continuation of the Swiss neutrality policy basically said that neutrality makes sense as a political strategy only if there are competitive forces whom one should seek to bring to terms with one another. Finding oneself confronted with a world without such competitions and with a community of partners sharing the vision of peaceful cohabitation, the keeping to neutrality would no longer be neutral but rather indicate a status of marginality, according to this critique (Ott 1992: 108). In other words, the appropriateness was doubted of neutrality to meet its own political ends: If security political neutrality was meant to be an expression of solidarity with the forces that commit themselves to a peaceful future, it would imply under the changed circumstances that Switzerland was to join the UN and the EU as soon as possible; keeping out of a universalist European political body would in fact contradict the spirit and former ends of neutrality (*ibid.*). Opinions were and have remained split over this issue in Switzerland. A radical breach of the long-standing tradition of neutrality was not capable of winning a majority in the country; on the contrary: a considerable number of Swiss doubted that one needed any military any longer and was thus favouring an ‘unarmed neutrality’ to follow the time of Swiss ‘armed neutrality’.

Until the 1980s, the *bonmot* found much approval in Switzerland that the country *had* no army but *formed* one. The social prestige of the military was very high in Switzerland, it procured for careers in the private sector and in political life, and commitment in the military sector stood for civic virtue proper. For decades, survey data showed an impressive degree of the Swiss citizens’ identification with their militia. In between 1970 and 1984 the consent rate to the existence and organisational form of the Swiss Armed

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<sup>3</sup> Obviously, Switzerland did not maintain neutrality in all of its political domains during the Cold War. The country saw itself as a member of the (politically speaking) western world, yet without joining the respective international organisations. Economically, Switzerland took over the export control limitations against the USSR and its satellites as they were devised by the US in 1951 (see Möckli 2000: 239 ff. and Gabriel 1997: 12). Neutrality was hence primarily defined as the country’s strategy in security politics.

Forces was regularly exceeding 80%! In the year 1988 there were still 72% of the population in favour of maintaining the armed forces as they were (Buri/Haltiner/Spillmann 1991: 29). So, when a plebiscitary approach to abolish conscription and the armed forces altogether found the consent of 36% in November 1989, i.e. right after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it meant a decline in support of 12% within one year. This was rated a tremendous loss of credit under Swiss circumstances (Haltiner 1992).

The formerly rather unconditional acceptance of the military became obviously upset by the 1989/90 events. Some experts interpret the rise in criticism as an arrival of rationalism in a field of Swiss identity politics which appeared to be loaded to an extraordinary extent with collective romanticism before: In modern times, the armed forces would simply have to be judged in their value as functional state instruments and not so much in their role as national marker or societal community builder, says this critique. The dissolution of military threats would clearly imply a devaluation of the established instruments in domestic and foreign politics so that alternative instruments were to be developed to face the contemporary challenges (see, e.g. Haltiner 1992: 164 f.). In a radicalised stance, the very position that the Swiss military was outmoded altogether inspired the above quoted plebiscitary initiative to abolish the country's armed forces. The needed 100,000 signatures to be collected within 18 months to make possible such a vote were successfully collected by the institutionalised "Group Switzerland without Armed Forces" GSOA (*Gruppe Schweiz ohne Armee*), and the first voting took place in late 1989. The results were clear expression of dissatisfaction with the *status quo*: Apart from the above quoted total of 36% in favour of the abolition initiative, a majority among the 20 to 29-year olds – who are the age group for conscript recruitment – voted for it, and in two cantons, even an absolute majority favoured the abolishment of the Armed Forces. The negative results shocked the political leadership of the country, and it urged to react to it in some way. A series of conceptual programs for reforming the Swiss military system have been developed and set up for political decision-making since.

A number of program papers were compiled on behalf of the executive, the Swiss Federal Council (*Schweizer Bundesrat*), that all aim to pull together the relevant parameters of the new world order from Swiss perspective. Quite different from the pre-1989 understanding of neutrality, the latter became redefined in the process of these programme revisions to include close ties of cooperation with friendly foreign countries and with organisations whose principles could not harm the Swiss understanding of neutrality nor contradict the ends of Swiss security policy (*ibid.*: 26). This opening paved the way for the country's active engagement in military missions abroad under the condition of meeting the UN criteria of legitimacy (see Däniker/Spillmann 1992: 600 ff).

## **Military Engagement Abroad**

In January 2000, an amended Swiss Federal Constitution came into force. It contains several reformulations in the programmatic outline and definition of aims of the Swiss foreign policy. With respect to the policy of neutrality, it is restated to be the guiding and

most relevant principle for Swiss foreign policy. And yet, the understanding of neutrality appears to be softened. The previous constitution named the following as the country's foreign political goal: "Maintenance of the fatherland's independence from the exterior, and the management of peace and order in the interior". This phrasing dates back from the Federal Contract of 1815, and it had been left unchanged until the year 2000. The new legal frame is set like this: "The Swiss Confederacy protects the people's rights and liberty and keeps the country's independence and security" (BV Art. 2, Abs.1). In recognition of the ever closer interrelations between interior and exterior developments in an age of globalisation, a widening of the Swiss scope of foreign political activities was the declared aim which the constitution laid the legal foundations for. The shift is recognizable in Article 54 of the Federal Constitution of 2000:

"The Confederacy aims at the keeping of the Swiss independence in the world and at its well-being; it contributes concretely to poverty alleviation and the easing of distress in the world, to the respect of human rights and the promotion of democracy, to the peoples' peaceful cohabitation and the preservation of vital resources." (BV Art. 54, Abs. 2)

Following the amendment of the Federal Constitution, the Swiss Federal Council issued a Foreign Political Report in November 2000 which explains the new political agenda in detail and spells it out as meaning a strengthening of multilateralism. Concretely the report declares pursuit of the plan to join the UNO, and to strive for closer cooperation, if not even membership in the EU (which was rejected in the meantime by a narrow majority of the Swiss). Increased activities are also announced to be taken to foster peace promotion abroad – with civilian and also with military means (Schweizerischer Bundesrat 2000, Abs. 3.2. and 3.3.). The essence reads that, "the Federal Council wants to look after interests and responsibility by intensifying cooperation on the international stage" (*ibid.*: 263 f.).

The shift to cooperation in the Swiss foreign policy has rendered consequences for the Armed Forces. At present, the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sports names as the mission of the Armed Forces "security and defence, subsidiary operations to prevent and overcome mortal dangers as well as contributions to peace promotion within an international framework". The federal law on the Armed Forces and the military administration specifies these under the header "Task of the Armed Forces", as follows:

1. The Armed Forces contributes to preventing war and thereby to the keeping of peace.
2. It defends Switzerland and the country's population and contributes to their protection.
3. It assists the civil authorities once their means do not suffice any more:
  - a) in averting major threats to interior security;

- b) in coping with other extraordinary situations, particularly in the case of disasters at home and abroad.
4. It makes a contribution to the support of peace in the international frame.  
(MG, Art.1)

The fourth paragraph is the newest and most crucial one: It was added in a federal legislation act from 2002 and has been in legal force since January 2004. Paragraph 3 b) was likewise reformulated in 2002 and legally enacted in 2004.

A cautious approach to out-of-area engagement of the Swiss military had started right after the end of the Cold War: Since 1990, officers from the Swiss Armed Forces have been participating in UN peacekeeping missions as unarmed military observers.<sup>4</sup> Before that, Switzerland had contributed only financially to selected missions of the UNO, and from 1953 on, Switzerland had taken part in the Neutral Nations' Supervisory Commission in Korea to guard the ceasefire between the two Koreas. Five members of the Swiss Armed Forces are based in Panmunjom currently to control the inner Korean border. Apart from this long-term employment of Swiss soldiers out-of-area, Switzerland is represented today in a number of missions under UN, OSCE and NATO-mandates.

In December 1996 the then Swiss foreign minister Flavio Cotti signed the Partnership for Peace-Agreement of NATO<sup>5</sup> whilst also making it clear in an accompanying declaration that Switzerland had no intention to become a regular NATO member state. In spite of this reservation, the joining of NATO's Partnership for Peace Programme is *the* decision in Swiss foreign and security policy which represents most pronouncedly the turn away from a dissuasive and towards a cooperative defence strategy. For the Swiss Armed Forces it marks the related shift in emphasis from conventional defence tasks to a broad engagement in international peacekeeping (see the official statements at [www.vtg.admin.ch/internet/groupgst/de/home/peace/partnerschaft0.html](http://www.vtg.admin.ch/internet/groupgst/de/home/peace/partnerschaft0.html)). As a result from the policy change to cooperation, 23 Swiss officers (ranking captain or higher) are stationed abroad in different UN missions right now; further employment out-of-area is listed below:

- 10 in the Near East (UNTSO)
- 4 in Georgia
- 2 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC)

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<sup>4</sup> These are the so-called "Blue Helmet"-missions; the Swiss military observers were named "Yellow Helmets" when Switzerland was not yet a member in the UNO.

<sup>5</sup> The Partnership for Peace was founded in 1994 by NATO in order to spread stability and foster peace in the whole of Europe. NATO offered all interested states of the Euro-Atlantic region a forum for cooperating in the security political realm. The OSCE states were invited to join, and up to the present time, 27 states followed the invitation. The PFP is no defence community in the conventional sense but it does entail consultation processes if member states see their territorial integrity, their political independence or security threatened.

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- 1 in Ethiopia/ Eritrea (UNMEE)
  - 6 in Nepal (UNMIN)

**NNSC:** Five members of the Swiss Armed Forces help control the inner Korean border with a mandate of the Neutral Nations' Supervisory Commission.

**ISAF:** Since April 2003 two to four officers of the Swiss Armed Forces take part in the ISAF mission; they are armed for self-defence.

**EUFOR:** Since December 2004 up to four field officers (*Stabsoffiziere*) and two “Liaison and Observation Teams” (LOT), each consisting of eight persons, are based in Bosnia-Herzegovina; they are armed for self-defence.

**KFOR:** In 1999 the Swiss Federal Assembly decided to take part in the KFOR mission in Kosovo. Since October 2006 the fifteenth contingent of SWISSCOY supports KFOR with two companies, i.e. the Swiss Sup Coy (Supporting company) and the Swiss Int Coy (Infantry company). The operation is supposed to end in 2008.

Between 1996 and 2000, Swiss “Yellow Helmets” have contributed to the OSCE-Mission in Bosnia. 120 Swiss soldiers took part in a post-Tsunami humanitarian mission in the Indonesian island of Sumatra in 2005.

([www.vtg.admin.ch/internet/groupgst/de/home/peace/peace/laufende.html](http://www.vtg.admin.ch/internet/groupgst/de/home/peace/peace/laufende.html))

## Doctrinal Revisions

Apart from changes in the legal frame so as to enable the sending of Swiss soldiers into UN peacekeeping missions, the acknowledgement of changed security threats and conditions in the post-Cold War era has led to alterations in the Swiss Military Doctrine. The traditional Swiss defence concept is not suspended. But it has been qualified with reference to the vanished likelihood of any conventional war to be waged in defence of the country’s territory. Originally, the Swiss strategy of acting neutrally in foreign policy and of exercising explicited equality within the polity (Möckli 2000: 235 f.) was geared towards the ‘classical’ type of military threats consisting of an aggression against the own national territory. Such an attack would be countered by a nation in arms “with huge conscript armies using relatively simple mass-produced weapons to inflict mass destruction on the enemy in a war of strategic attrition” (Latham 2002: 245). In the vein of the traditional territorial defence concept, the largest proportion of Swiss militia troops were always trained for infantry tasks. With the territorial notion of defence being on the retreat and more particularly with military threats against Swiss territory being an issue of vanishing importance – as is conceded in all the relevant security political documents of the country (see, e.g. Aussenpolitischer Bericht 2000: 297; or likewise in Armeeleitbild XXI: 8-12, 22) – the national security and defence parameters were revised. Several reform acts have adapted the size and structure of the Swiss military to the changed perception of threats to Swiss security.

Meanwhile, there is one problem that limits the reform endeavours. It is set by the constitution. The Federal Constitution states that “Switzerland has Armed Forces”, and that “it is principally organised in the form of a militia” (BV 2000, Art. 58). With the declared wish to improve the interoperability of the Swiss military with the armed forces of other countries, a re-organisation in structure, armament and further equipment, in training and military doctrine became necessary. However, any reform is bound to meet the constitutional demand for maintaining the militia system. The balancing act of having to meet these competing demands marks the military doctrinal discourse in Switzerland; and it splits the opinions over the extent of necessary institutional rearrangements – inclusive of the questions whether recruitment should not be organised differently because of the contemporary service reality and the constitution be altered to allow for it.

The classical doctrine, connected to the militia system was the deterrence of militarised aggression by means of a dissuasively well-fortified nation: Every inch gained by a potential enemy would be so costly: the militia could be mobilised immediately and be all around and fight as a conventional force to defend the territory and the population. In the event of mobilisation, obstacles and barriers would be activated, demolition devices in key bridges and tunnels would be set off, important infrastructure destroyed, water levels lowered and fuel tanks burned. The combination of such powerful conventional resistance forces, a perfect topography for keeping up efficient resistance with guerrilla means, and the declared willingness to destruction of Switzerland's industrial, communications, and transportation infrastructure in the case of an aggression made up the strategy of dissuasion: Nothing of value could be gained, and occupation would mean a weary fight against a resistant, militarily well-trained and armed population. As a defence strategy, conventionally armed dissuasion met some of its limits already under conditions of the nuclear arms age; with the contemporary threat scenarios of, e.g. a heightened risk of terrorist attacks or the use of high-tech distance weaponry, the Swiss militia set-up fits less and less.

To update its conceptual foundations, the Swiss Armed Forces hold a military doctrine division for research and development. It is the responsible unit for (re-)formulating the medium-term foundations for the military-strategic conceptions in accordance with the politically strategic guidelines (like the Swiss Security Policy Report or the Armed Forces Guidelines and the Law on the Military). The current doctrinal foundations paper (BDMT-06) heads off from the acknowledgement of a fundamentally changed security environment, resulting from the end of the Cold War. After a description of these well-known general conditions, lessons are drawn for the adequate character which military missions may take on because of the changed constellation in international security affairs:

“More than 15 years ago, a new constellation which has lasted until today of diffuse, asymmetrical, multilayered and global threats has replaced the former classical, symmetrical threat, which in the final analysis was foreseeable, as it originated in the past decades from the Warsaw Pact. Today against the background of this change in paradigm, it is no longer possible to simply define the requirements of the future on the basis of a threat analysis; far more, an approach suggests itself which on the one hand is based on performance profile

and continuum of military operations and on the other on the capabilities of the armed forces as well as the operational concepts.

The main challenge for modern armed forces is to distinguish between two specific options of coercive operations in the future: first, containment of violence in order to prevent the spread of risks and dangers, and secondly the use of military force in order to destroy a classical military enemy. Therefore four types of operations can be regarded as a basis for reflection: support operations, stabilising operations in Switzerland and its immediate environment and stabilising operations abroad in cooperation with other countries as well as defence operations.”

(<http://www.vtg.admin.ch/internet/groupgst/en/home/planung/milit.html>)

While the “containment of violence in order to prevent the spread of risks and dangers” is a catch-all phrase that allows for all sorts of interpretations if necessary, it remains not less unclear, which of the four listed operation types may possibly be conducted out of Switzerland and which not – is only support and stabilising legitimate, or also defence operations? Even if one trusts the process of checks-and-balance in political decision-making to such an extent that any precarious stationing of Swiss troops is judged for improbable, the projection of diffuse employment visions as such is quite a deviation from the former no-frills character of the Swiss defence doctrine. The traditional image of the militia soldier is challenged by the extended security concept that speaks from the current doctrinal documents: The militia used to be legitimised with an immediate identification of the Swiss nation as being the defence community and the protégé at the same time, requiring an equal burden sharing in the polity. The military was hence less conceptualised as an instrument of the state than as one of the constituency. Every Swiss (male) was regarded as being able and obliged to defend the polity. With the questioning of the defence structures as being inadequate for nowadays’ conditions, this traditional understanding of Swiss direct democracy is challenged.

#### 4. The Swiss Format of Soldiering Contested

As has been shown, the discussion of the future of the Swiss military is closely connected with the debate surrounding neutrality, participation in missions abroad, and with the anticipation of unconventional threats to Swiss security. The traditional argument has it that “among citizens, militia obligations are closely related to their direct democratic participation within the state”, and that ”duties and rights are not to be separated” (Haltiner 2003: 55). From a perspective on the making of communalism and commitment in democracy, this makes perfect sense. It comes at no surprise then that the advance of modernity in connection with the nationalisation and democratisation of political communities made conscription the winning ticket in the past:

“Conscription as a system of military recruitment (...) was among other things, part of forging important linkages between the individual and the emerging

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nation-state and did, in this sense, not just stand out as a reflection of things to come but was also furnished with a constitutive impact.” (Joenniemi 2006: 5)

Nevertheless, to derive the recruitment principle for military service from the political balancing of rights and duties in a democratic citizenry means that it is not genuinely military arguments which back the maintenance of conscription but the system’s favourable effects in respect of the polity’s internal social and political integration endeavour. In Switzerland, this is clearly the case today, as the leading expert on the matter, Karl Haltiner, states. Based at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, Haltiner is in charge of conducting the annual opinion polls about issues of Swiss security and defence politics (e.g., the current report is “Sicherheit 2006”). Haltiner distinguishes between arguments which relate to the military’s function proper (not demanding the militia system) and the traditionalist discourse which is voiced in favour of maintaining the militia and universal conscription<sup>6</sup>:

“Military efficiency achieved through modern technology relies more on manned armament and systems and less on the amount of armed men. Conceivably, a different army format could prove to work just as well. In Switzerland, however, *the politically motivated adherence to the principle of equal burden sharing among young men* is the reason for maintaining the status quo.” (Haltiner 2003: 55; emphasis added)

The technological revolution Haltiner cites has challenged conscription at large, for reasons of cost-efficiency, the changed phenomenology of military engagement and “new” warfare in particular; and – in relation with these factors – for the ideational reasons of moral and political legitimacy for sending soldiers into such unconventional missions. The decline of the mass armies across Europe is a consequence of the related shift in threat perceptions and diffuse conflict scenarios that render regular warfare more and more exceptional, render defence a more abstract issue, and ask for well-trained military specialists to handle the high-tech armament (see Latham 2002: 245 ff.). The format of the militia is therefore under pressure in Switzerland also. Changes in the societal value system contribute even more to an increasing criticism of universal conscription for the system of the militia can only work if it meets with sufficient support. The Swiss direct democracy offers particular possibilities to evaluate the extent to which the constituency is prepared to that.

## **Reform of the Swiss Armed Forces as the People’s Will**

The processes of revision, eventual downsizing of the reserve troops and opening up of the classical neutrality concept were pushed forward with one peculiar instrument of Switzerland’s democratic system, i.e. the strong direct democracy provision of the

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6 In Germany, it is likewise mostly the argument of the successful integration of the armed forces in democratic society that is brought forward in defence of conscription, and no argumentation which is derived from the functioning of the military as an institution that has to deliver a particular service.

plebiscite. This is an aspect of the democratic control of the armed forces which is particular to the democracy type. Not coincidentally, the military reforms and the political opening for participation in international military missions followed two initiatives to abolish the Armed Forces. The above quoted 1989 poll expression of so many citizens' dissatisfaction with the state of affairs speeded up the political process in which the Swiss parliament and federal government leaders came to rethink and revise the traditional military parameters:

“The initiative [to abolish the armed forces] triggered a substantial reform of the armed forces, which otherwise would have taken place either late or not at all. Secondly, it caused a ‘liberalisation’ of military style in Switzerland resulting in the militia force losing its indisputable position as a national core symbol and turning it into a political institution, making it subject to criticism in the same way as other political bodies. Furthermore, the initiative indirectly helped enhance the country’s readiness for an opening of the security sector, as well as the creation of an alternative civil service for conscientious objectors” (Haltiner/Tresch 2004: 361 f.).

Starting from the observation that the international situation was marked by “hope, uncertainty, and instability” (Bundesrat der Schweiz 1990: 6 ff.) the call for a reform of the Swiss military structure was in the first reform wave taken up in the concept of a “Vision 95” for the Army: “*Armeeleitbild 95*”, a programme paper dating from 1992 sets out to make possible flexible adaptations to the changing security requirements. Of course, the militia was not abolished, for there had been no majority in favour of that option. But the Swiss Armed Forces were reformed, made smaller, complemented with a slightly larger proportion of professionals, and given a new role projection which reaches beyond the borders of Switzerland.

The fact that a second initiative to abolish the military system was a relative failure indicates the overall consent of the citizenry with the path chosen after the first vote: The second plebiscite initiated by the same “Group Switzerland without Armed Forces” GSOA (*Gruppe Schweiz ohne Armee*) and executed in 2001, had a low participation rate and found low rates of approval also, even among those youngest voter groups who are biographically closest to recruitment. The fact that an alternative civilian service had been introduced with the “Vision 95” (*Armeeleitbild 95*) reform package contributed to the increase in young people’s consent (see Haltiner/Bennett 2002; Haltiner/ Tresch 2004: 364). The military reform process is thus a fine example for the – admittedly slowly working – corrective functioning of the special instruments which are available in the Swiss direct democracy: Initiatives like the ones to abolish the Armed Forces “operate as ‘early warning systems’ for the political establishment about ongoing changes in society” (Haltiner/ Tresch 2006: 196). Concretely, however, the overall high rates of young people who opt for the alternative civilian service since its introduction in the 1990s have also started to create organisational problems for the militia. On the long run, the system can only survive if it remains the rule to absolve militia training and the exception to absolve the alternative civilian service; and if a sufficient number of volunteers can be recruited for the officer’s cadre functions:

“Without finding enough volunteers willing to do more military service than the minimal legal obligation, today’s militia system could not be maintained. (...) In the course of modernisation, individualisation and pluralisation have taken hold in society, just as in other European countries. Values have changed to such an extent that the traditional commitment to the *res publica* is drastically diminishing.” (Haltiner 2003: 55)

Even though the taken reforms were thus successful in steering the immediate military policy according to the citizenry’s will, the keeping of the militia is not necessarily secured despite the high approval it earned in the second plebiscitary vote.

## **Reform Contents**

Following the abolishment initiatives, a sequence of structural reforms were taken to adapt the Swiss Armed Forces to the new security political agenda, starting with “Vision 95” (*Armeeleitbild 95*): The number of active militia members was cut from nearly 600,000 to 300,000 by lowering the reserve age. The Swiss air force was strengthened while the traditional weight of the infantry troops geared at territorial defence was reduced. Specialist troops of volunteering professionals were founded to be trained for the prospective Swiss share in international humanitarian and peacekeeping missions. The duration of conscripts’ training were set to range in between 18 and 24 weeks with 21 weeks being the standard. All of these steps have found much acclaim in the population but they are perceived more in terms of a peace-dividend, i.e. a reasonable budgeting strategy, than in terms of a change in conceptualising and practically redefining the normative sketch of the military (Haltiner 1995: 90 f.).

A further reform was issued from 2003 to 2005 under the header of “Armed Forces XXI” (*Armee XXI*). The overall size of the Armed Forces was reduced further from 300,000 to 220,000 in 2003 as a part of this package. Altogether, the reduction steps were the following:

Armed Forces 61:	800,000
Armed Forces 95:	400,000 (300,000 active; 100,000 reservists)
Armed Forces XXI	200,000 (120,000 active; 80,000 reservists; +20,000 recruits)

Armed Forces XXI continues also with the trend to a greater opening of Swiss troops for being employed with tasks out of area that serve humanitarian missions and peacekeeping, foremost by way of a constabularization and with the help of modular concepts, e.g. assisting military logistics in cooperation with NATO troops. The programme of the “Armed Forces XXI” is explained to be fully compatible with the constitutional frame of 1999 in a related governmental declaration on the updated security policy. It deserves to be reproduced at some more length:

„(...) Switzerland remains neutral, but it makes use of its neutrality-legal and political possibilities to prevent war and foster peace. Joining NATO is not up for discussion. Switzerland is, however, a member in the OSCE, in EAPC and in CENCOOP and it participates in the Partnership for Peace. A common security architecture is under construction in Europe. The EU's common security and foreign policy takes shape. National armed forces start to cooperate which becomes inter alia observable in the form of multinational troops. Being neither a member of NATO nor of EU/WEU, Switzerland has no say in this European development. Joining the Partnership for Peace allows for a flexible participation in international security matters. According to SIPOL B 2000, the armed forces' tasks entail 'contributions to international support of peace and crisis settlement, protection of space and defence as well as subsidiary missions for prevention and the coping with existential threats'. The Federal Council judges the situation periodically and adapts the security policy if necessary.

### 2.3 Crucial issues in Swiss security strategy

The Federal Council sets three issues as crucial:

- Prevention of crisis and violent conflicts with all available diplomatic, humanitarian, economic, further civilian, and military means. Participation in UNO- or OSCE-mandated operations and activities in favour of the stabilisation of unrestful regions, general peacekeeping and effective as well as sustainable crisis management in the European environment;
- Self-assertion. Defence of country and population as an expression of our state's sovereignty, and hence as the army's core capability;
- Inner security and stability. This entails a comprehensive and flexible system of security cooperation among all competent national means and organisations. Inner security is primarily an issue to be taken care of by the civilian authorities of the Federation and the Cantons and their police forces. The army is ready for subsidiary contributions.

### 2.4 Role and status of the Army

The army puts the changes into practice by extending the deterrence strategy of defence and resistance (dissuasion) into a multifold strategy of abilities to cooperation. (...)

### 2.5 Militia character of the Army

Switzerland keeps the military service obligation and the system of the militia. Defence justice is to be maintained. Every citizen must be ready for a certain time to protect Switzerland and its interests, and even defend it with the risk for the own life and health in the extreme case. Civilian service is possible. For women, military service is voluntary. The advantages of the militia are that it makes use of the citizens' potential; it produces extraordinary commitment; it brings civilian knowledge and up-to-date capabilities of all kinds in; it strengthens the cohesion of our four-lingual community. Experiences with all-volunteer armies underline the advantages of the militia impressively: Some all-volunteer forces had to lower

their qualitative profiles drastically to recruit sufficient staff. The disadvantage of the militia is its limited usability, in particular for immediate action. The share of militia will remain on a high level in the Armed Forces XXI. (...) Military cadre training complements the civilian manager training. It makes important theoretical and practical contributions. The army is economically beneficial not only in respect of security but likewise in the training of leaders.“

(Eidgenössisches Departement für Verteidigung, Bevölkerungsschutz und Sport: Politische Leitlinien des Bundesrates zum Armeeleitbild XXI 1-2/20 and 7/20, 31.5.2000)

Despite some criticism that the Armed Forces XXI reform earned among oppositions' political opinion leaders, and for opposite reasons, the survey data on this reform point to the same direction as in the years before: A vast majority of the Swiss supports the policy chosen by their government (Haltiner/Tresch/Würmli 2006). Within 2 years after implementation of the reform package, the consent rate has reached 75%, as the Federal Institute for Technology's annual polls show. The current report, "Security 2006" (*Sicherheit 2006*; see Haltiner/Wenger/Tresch/Würmli 2006) reveals that there are remarkable growth rates in the population's trust in and acceptance of the new Armed Forces from 2005 to 2006. Based on a representative survey of 1,200 participants, the question about the use of the Armed Forces reached the highest scores in ten years. This is taken for a clear expression of the reformed Swiss military's popularity. In addition to this positive general mood, even 81% expressed that they wanted to have well equipped and well trained forces in Switzerland; this is the highest score ever gained in the opinion polls that have been conducted by the Federal Institute for Technology in Zurich at irregular intervals since 1983 and annually since 1991.

In spite of the high consent rate found for the Armed Forces XXI, the most recent attempt to further restructure the Swiss Armed Forces and allocate new tasks for it – "Development Step 08/11" (*Entwicklungsschritt 08/11*), failed to find the needed consent in the Federal Assembly in October 2006 with 73 votes in favour of and 101 votes against the proposed measures. The parties from the political centre were in favour of the initiative. The main opponents against the amendment were the left-wing Greens and the right-wing Swiss People's Party SVP; and – as before already – for opposite reasons: The Green party fears that the military shall be utilised increasingly for issues pertaining to interior security, such as protecting international summits. The conservative SVP, on the other hand, is mostly critical of the proposed re-patternings in armament which would derive the infantry troops of their traditional predominance; furthermore, they are altogether critical of recent years' deviation from Swiss isolationist foreign policy and the out-of-area engagement in particular. The dissenting factions of the political public in and outside of parliament who raise the issue of the transformation in terms of an ongoing (politically either wrong or insufficient) re-conceptualisation of the military either argue for a much more comprehensive reform or – at the other end of the political spectrum – warn against exactly this trend: Complete professionalisation is favoured by the Swiss Greens who represent many of the younger urban Swiss. The traditionalist faction of the SVP perceives of the intended reform 08/11 already as signifying an increasing loss of the original sense of the military institution as being there for national defence purposes

with the important „symbolic components of civic virtue and commitment“ (Haltiner 1998: 7). The SVP opposes any further professionalisation as much as an extension of Switzerland's participation in military missions abroad.

These mixed opinions meet with the results of the Federal Institute for Technology's annual poll on foreign policy, security and defence policy in Switzerland: Based on the last survey, the researchers distinguish between four dominant opinion types in Swiss society. They are classified as follows:

- Full supporters (30%); who regard equally relevant all the different tasks the military is given these days.
- Conservative autonomists (29%); who regard the defence of Swiss space and the disaster control and civil protection tasks at home for the most relevant military tasks and express rather negative judgements on out-of-area missions of any kind.
- Opponents of constabularisation (16%); who wish to have a clear task division between the military and the police forces and do not like to see the army engaged with interior security issues; the Armed Forces should concentrate on defence and disaster control according to this viewpoint.
- People ready for opening (25%); who regard peacekeeping missions abroad together with disaster control at home and abroad as well as defence proper as the most relevant military tasks, while they let all other issues rank at medium levels.

(Haltiner/Tresch/Würmli 2006: 2)

Now, the parliamentary controversial “Development Step 08/11” (*Entwicklungsschritt 08/11*) was to implement larger investment in military capabilities of disaster control, while the stock of classical defence equipment such as tanks and artillery provisions was planned to be reduced; the number of soldiers trained and held prepared for peacekeeping missions abroad was meant to be doubled, and the Federal Council were to gain competencies in the decision making on employing the Armed Forces (see above). The constitutional framing of the system, i.e. maintenance of militia and neutrality, were not intended to be questioned as such. And yet, under this roof, parliamentary control of deployment would have become looser, and the employment of soldiers for policing tasks in the country was planned to be made easier. The original act in this direction dates back to the year 2002 though: On 6<sup>th</sup> November 2002, the Federal Council decided that, for budgeting reasons, the Swiss Armed Forces should be made use of more extensively to meet the growing demands for general protection tasks such as border control, protection of property, the guarding of embassies and consulates, of international conventions and summits, or of public events like international soccer matches. The resulting constabularisation of the Swiss Armed Forces for inner security tasks and its effects do not meet with unanimous appreciation. One critical objection against an increasing use of the Armed Forces for police tasks is that such ‘un-military’ employments proliferate an erosion of the military qualifications proper (see, e.g., Thormann 2006). But as a matter

of fact, 75% of the Swiss have no problems with the concept of a merged ‘security production’ in the country, in which the Armed Forces is one of the trustworthy producers (cf. UNIVOX 2006).

## Final Remarks

To sum up, the traditional Swiss defence paradigm – being the politically neutral nation in arms – has come under pressure in the wake of the changed world order post 1989/90. Like in other European countries, the conscription system were challenged also in Switzerland (1) by a societal value change which procures the military with less prestige, and (2) by conflict scenarios and (3) a technological development both of which relativise the concept of large numbers of an armed militia ready for self-defence. In contrast to other countries, however, Switzerland has not turned its defence and recruitment policies upside down. Instead, a happy medium is sought after, so as to keep the country’s core traditions in this policy field whilst also adapting them to new environmental circumstances. Plebiscites revealed a clear majority in favour of reforming the Swiss system, but within the limits of the tradition: With the plausibility of international cooperation catching the eye in the new security environment, neutrality shall not be given up; and while there are evident difficulties in recruiting adequately trained staff and higher cadres to keep the system going and to be able to participate in international peacekeeping missions, the holy cow of the militia shall neither be slaughtered but at the most be complemented with a higher rate of employed staff. Switzerland might be on the way towards installing a “pseudo conscript army” like it is the case with the German *Bundeswehr*.<sup>7</sup> But there are other options, too, such as the volunteer militia. It is not unlikely that the Swiss will put the crucial question of equal shares in contemporary defence duties up for debate. And given the instruments of direct democracy in Switzerland, this is likely to become an issue for decisionmaking at the ballot box.

The fact that the normative construction of the Swiss Militia soldier has been left untouched so far as regards the traditional parameters of universal conscription and the country’s foreign political neutrality is related at the most to the high valuation which the Swiss Armed Forces system and the doctrine of neutrality still enjoy for domestic cohesion building, i.e. as national identity resources. Support of the militia as being an embodiment of all (male) citizens’ service for the *res publica* has therefore triumphed as yet over the arguments of military efficiency that speak for an all-volunteer force like elsewhere. Clinging to neutrality poses problems as well because it does not make much sense any longer in the setting of an increasingly unifying Europe.

In spite of the outward resilience of the Swiss militia system and the policy of neutrality, a cautious opening of these political core traditions becomes visible: The Swiss

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7 Universal conscription is not ended officially in Germany, but only every third German male is called upon to serve the armed forces.

participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace marks the breach in the dyke. The gradual downsizing of the militia reserve which has been accompanied by a growing rate of professionals in the Swiss Armed Forces, also the notable orientation towards international interoperability, and last but not least, the redistribution in armament structures clearly indicate a process of change even though it is a moderate one in European comparison.

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