

Women in Security – The role of women in security

Concluding report | 5th SSF Security Talk on the 14th of November 2019, University of Lucerne

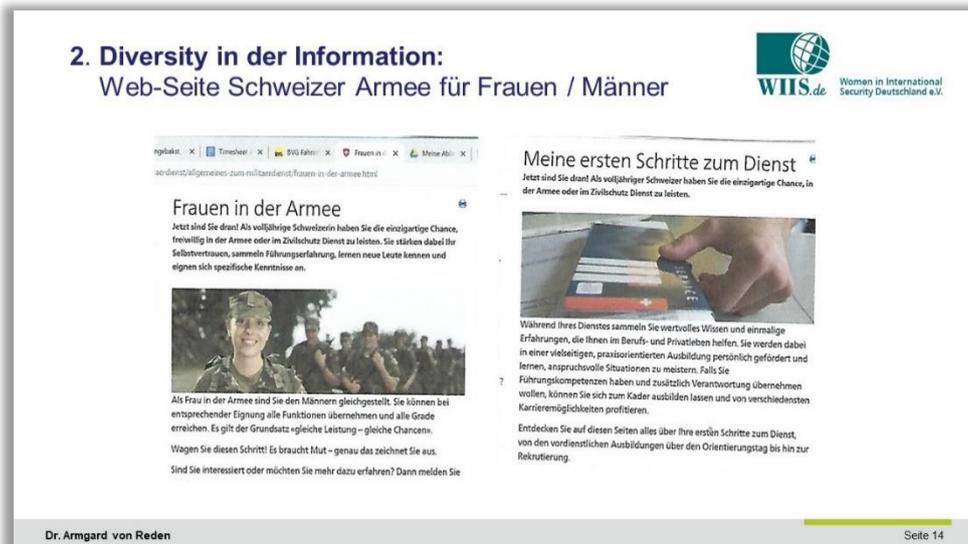
Federal Councillor Viola Amherd is the first woman in Switzerland to head the defence department. Diversity is crucial not only in security policy and conflict mediation, but also in corporate risk management and cyber security. Yet it is precisely in these areas that women are often not at the table. To change this, Switzerland's first female defence minister calls for one thing above all: concrete action.

Around 250 guests attended the 5th FSS Security Talk at the University of Lucerne, organised by the SWISS SECURITY FORUM together with the Lucerne Initiative for Peace and Security (LIPS) and the Security Policy Forum Central Switzerland (SPFZ). The event was opened by **Prof. Dr. Bruno Staffelbach**, Rector of the University of Lucerne. He assured the participants that **security concerns** "not only 51% of the population", but **all of us**. He emphasised the general problem of "under-representation of women in positions of authority". This was evident in politics and the **public sector** as well as in research and the **private sector** - despite the recognition that mixed teams work more efficiently and better. **Dr. Bernhard Wigger**, President of LIPS, then explained that advances and "**top-down**" **approaches** to the topic of diversity and diversity in Switzerland will not work unless **sensitivity** to these issues is created. Thus, the SFF event was right to focus on measures to strengthen women in the security sector.

Diversity by Design

During the opening speech by **Dr. Armgard von Reden**, Chairwoman Women in International Security Germany, the participants were able to immerse themselves in the topic "**Diversity by Design**". Dr. von Reden demonstrated with vivid examples, some of which caused laughter in the audience, that diversity has actually been on **our minds for a long time**: In education, product development, ICT, medicine and the media. For example, the first **speech recognition software** did not recognise women's voices and the first mobile phones could not even transmit women's voices. **Artificial intelligence** applications such as automated application systems and image recognition software often worked for a long time only for Western European men, i.e. those groups of people who were involved in the development.

The **website "Women in the Army"** also received a special mention, for which the expert identified clear potential for improvement – the same applied to its counterpart in the Bundeswehr and the British Army.



Source: Presentation Dr. Armgard von Reden

Dr. von Reden sees the reasons for the under-representation of women in the security sector on the one hand in the **education system** (e.g. in the IT sector, less than 10% of graduates are female) and on the other hand in the lack of **female role models** for young women to follow. Since organisations have increasingly identified equality and diversity as **success factors**, Dr. von Reden hopes that more women will soon be found in the security sector, despite its **image problem**.

To conclude, Dr. von Reden presented several approaches how organisations can promote diversity in a concrete way. Simple, but often very successful, is for example the method of "**Good After-speech**", with which a pool of motivated and well-qualified women can be quickly formed to fill management positions.

Diversity as the key to success

Dr. Allan Guggenbühl, psychologist and director of the Institute for Conflict Management, highlighted the gender differences in **conflict situations**. In extraordinary and unexpected situations, the behaviour of the sexes (but also within the same sex) would often differ. These **gender differences** are not a problem, however, "but a resource, a great opportunity". Women often use different conflict resolution mechanisms than men. While men think in **rigid systems**, women link logical insights with relationship aspects and thus find **surprising solutions**. Considering the unpredictability of conflicts, this mental flexibility plays a decisive role. According to Prof. Dr. Guggenbühl, these differences should therefore be understood as wealth and "not make everything the same". The security culture needs both male and female thinking - a new philosophy of **cooperation** in order to break the prevailing linear thinking, to make unexpected scenarios conceivable, and to cope with emerging, new conflicts.

Security is multidisciplinary and diverse – especially in cyber security

Dr. Maya Bundt, Head Cyber & Digital Strategy at Swiss Re, followed on from Dr. von Reden and shared the opinion that **high-performance teams** urgently need diversity. This diversity also includes the consideration of the different genders. According to Dr. Bundt, hardly any diverse teams are created today, especially in the security sector - because only around **11% of employees** in the **cyber security sector** worldwide **are female**. In agreement with Dr. von Reden, she sees the lack of technically trained female specialists as a central reason for this under-representation. It is undisputed that there must be more women in the future. Nevertheless, there is already hope, because cyber risks are not only purely technical risks. Teams would not only consist of "hackers and coders"; they would have to create a connection between different areas and involve the **human factor** more strongly as well. As an important **solution**, Dr. Bundt therefore advocates moving away from a purely technical view of the risks of the digital world and understanding cyber security and other security fields **as multidisciplinary areas**. This new holistic view of the cyber-security field can thus also encourage women from other, non-technical fields to make an important contribution in this exciting field of activity.



Source: Presentation Dr. Maya Bundt

Thinking along, having a say, co-determining

In her speech, **Federal Councillor Viola Amherd** also stressed the importance of women in the security sector. **Gender equality** is a central concern of hers, which is why she has also commissioned an internal working group to analyse the situation and work out measures to increase the number of women in the military. Switzerland's first female defence minister is convinced that **military service can also be interesting for women**. Her goal is to show what possibilities exist in the army, peace promotion and cyber defence and how women can take over leadership functions. For example, the top sports recruit school (RS) is an excellent instrument for combining compulsory military service and competitive sport. Federal

Councillor Amherd therefore wants to double the number of places in the top sport RS and supports all cantonal measures to improve information for young women during the orientation days.

But Federal Councillor Viola Amherd also stressed the importance of security policy exchange, **comparison and cooperation** in the promotion of women **with other states**. Only in this way could Switzerland make its contribution to international security and stability, because "military peace promotion is not a secondary matter". The first female head of the Federal Department of Defence calls for **concrete action** to increase diversity in all areas of security policy and **strengthen the presence of women**. In conclusion, Federal Councillor Amherd emphasised: "The willingness of young people to make their contribution to society is there, **we just have to pick them up properly.**"



Source: Daniel Saxer, iOf

Women on the rise

The Officers' Society also believes in the ability and strength of mixed teams, confirmed **Dr. Stefan Holenstein**, President of the Swiss Officers' Society. Although the **proportion of women** among those **performing military** service is currently **just under 1%**, a clear upward trend can be observed. It was also in the interest of the militia army to win over **the potential of women** for fulfilling missions. According to Holenstein, more information and sensitisation of women about security and the army is needed.

Women in the security sector

In the first round of the panel discussion, the personal experiences of the panel guests with the topic of women in security were addressed. In the case of **Lara Soltermann, Military Officer** in the Swiss Army and Systems Engineer at RUAG MRO Switzerland, the positive image of the army was already formed in her childhood when her father happily entered the service and returned home just as satisfied. However, there were also many **security policy discussions** in her family, which aroused her interest in the subject of security. Lara Soltermann is also a convinced **advocate of equal rights**, which includes not only rights but also duties. "If one demands equal rights for women, one must also accept the same duties".

The political philosopher and publicist **Katja Gentinetta** grew up in a completely different environment. There were no military and security policy discussions in her family. "At that time, military was not an issue for me", she said, "but women and security" had to be a self-evident **part of the gender equality issue**: "In the army and in the security sector, women are needed just as much as in business and politics: because of their specific experiences, their own view and their different approach". As a member of the **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** and as a political philosopher, Katja Gentinetta is also concerned with the **current global situation**, where security issues have regained relevance in the face of geopolitical shifts and new forms of threat: Europe and also Switzerland are **no longer** - as was long thought after 1989 - in a **utopian peaceful world**.



Source: Daniel Saxer, iOf

The career of **Marina Wyss Ross**, Deputy Head of the Mission for Security Policy Issues at the Swiss Mission in Vienna, was driven by her interest in diplomacy and **disarmament issues**. "I was aware that disarmament, for example humanitarian demining, is not only a technical field, but a highly complex field of work," she said. When she started her career as a young woman in the military and security sector, Marina Wyss Ross did not yet perceive it as a **male domain**. This awareness had only developed over time - not least because she was constantly asked why she was interested in these issues as a woman.

«The Exotic»

Women in the army are a new phenomenon, explained **Josef Dittli**, a member of the **FDP Council of States**, who also chairs the Council of States' Security Policy Commission. In the first ten years of his military career, he did not encounter a single woman in the army. "Only in the military school at the ETH was there a woman present who proved that both go well together." As former police director and head of the cantonal fire brigades, two different pictures presented themselves to him: The **fire brigade** had not yet really understood the promotion of women, but the **police** had.

Beat Hensler, Central Secretary of the Central Swiss Government Conference and former chief of police, agrees: "The best thing is a **mixed patrol**." He went on to say that the change towards more women in the police force was slowly emerging after the introduction of **women's voting rights** and gained momentum, especially in the 1980s. "We want to be a police force of the population", said Beat Hensler, "the population consists of 50% women, this should be reflected in the police force."

Paul Winiker, President of the Cantonal Government of Lucerne and Head of the Department of Security also described women as "exotic" during his military service. However, a **change in the security sector** can be felt, with 30% of the police force already being female. Paul Winiker also admitted, however, that there are still too few women in **management positions** and that there is still some catching up to do. "We must make more use of women's talents", Paul Winiker emphasised.

Female role models in security

For this reason, female **role models in high positions** are central to achieving greater diversity in the security industry, **Dr. Katja Gentinetta** stressed. Women in management positions would show the younger generations that this career path is possible for them. Especially in the **army** there is a **natural distance** between the female gender and security, as young women often only get in touch with the topic through their fathers and brothers. In order to win more women for the military, a space must be created in which women can deal with the topic personally and among themselves. "You have to cultivate a **direct exchange** with them", said Katja Gentinetta, "only then you can find out what is preventing the young women from joining the army and only then can you take effective action against it."

Josef Dittli saw it the same way: women had to be made aware that the army and security were also interesting for the female sex. Role models such as Federal Councillor Viola Amherd or the first president of the Officers' Society of the Canton of St. Gallen, Elisabeth Stadelmann-Meier, were crucial. They can promote the topic, initiate measures and **address young women directly**. But **schools** also play an important role and should expand political education with a focus on safety in the curriculum.

Paul Winiker also identified a **shortcoming in the curriculum** here and at the same time drew attention to the trend that more and more young men prefer community service to recruit school. "When it comes to the topic of security, it is not so much the lack of women that worries me as the loss of young men." In urban areas, more than 50% of men are no longer

prepared to do military service. The young generation - regardless of gender - should be encouraged to take up the issue again, so Paul Winiker.

Alternative recruitment systems for the army?

It is precisely this **gender-neutral approach** that would be right, **Dr. Gentinetta** emphasised, because quality should take precedence over quantity. The "**Norwegian model**", for example, would correspond to this, said **Lara Soltermann**. For a few years now, women have also been called up in Norway. Recruitment is based on the number of women and their skills, and no longer on gender. This is an exciting system but would require **a lot of work** and **rethinking** to transfer it to Switzerland. "Mindset and recruitment should be a question of **character and ability**, not gender," stressed Lara Soltermann.

Josef Dittli spoke out against general conscription, saying that compulsory military service for men was a tried and tested system. He wanted more women in the military, but it should be based on **free will** and be achieved by more promotion of information events and materials.

But there is another important aspect, said **Marina Wyss Ross**: The women's issue in security is also strongly linked to cultural and internalised **stereotypes**. It is time to become aware of these stereotypes and to act against them. One such stereotype is, for example, "women make peace and men make war". Marina Wyss Ross is regularly asked what she does as a woman in arms control. She then simply asks the counter-question: "I think it's an important and exciting area and you?" This stimulates thoughts and **exchange on the subject**.

In his closing remarks, Hans-Jürg Käser, President of the SWISS SECURITY FORUM (SSF) thanked Federal Councillor Amherd, the speakers and the audience for their valuable input and critical questions and stressed that security cannot be taken for granted: "Security has its price and all too often it is forgotten!"

We thank our event partners:

