

«The Future of Security»

Concluding report: First network event on November 1st 2018, Hotel Schweizerhof Bern

The successful first networking event of the Swiss Security Forum (SSF) brought together around 70 people with a professional or private interest in the topic of security. The exciting presentation by Deputy Army Chief Aldo C. Schellenberg and the subsequent panel discussion with former German defence attaché Peter Beschmidt provided interesting food for thought.

In his introductory words, SSF President Hans-Jürg Käser addressed the multifaceted nature of the topic security. He was pleased to welcome a professional audience that reflected this diversity through its diverse professional backgrounds. The President of the SFF also emphasised the central role of women, who have so far been under-reported in the discussion on the future of security.

No consciousness without personal involvement

Vice-President Claudia Hollenstein drew a striking parallel between the disease of diabetes and safety: information about diabetes has been available from various sources for many years. Nevertheless, many affected people said that they knew nothing about it before their illness or were not interested enough in it. This lack of risk awareness will lead to high economic costs in the health care sector in the coming years, said diabetes consultant Hollenstein. Safety is often dealt with in a similar way: as long as it is "taken for granted", it is not dealt with. Only when there is a lack of security in an area of life and a personal concern, people start to think about it - but then it may already be too late.

This lack of awareness can lead to high economic costs in the medium term. Hollenstein therefore called on the guests to go a step further and sensitise their personal environment to the topic of security - not least in order to be able to welcome more women in the audience at the next forum event.

Security – far more than an important locational advantage for Switzerland

Switzerland's stable and secure economic and legal system is central to its attractiveness as a location for business and investment, said Corps Commander Aldo C. Schellenberg at the beginning of his speech. But the importance of security goes even further: in the form of the guarantee that decisions can be made free of physical threats or economic constraints, it is part of the foundation of every democratic state. Or, as the Corps Commander put it: "Security is not everything - but without security everything is nothing".

Armed neutrality in a multipolar world order

Until the 1990s, the world was governed by a bipolar order, characterised by the contrast between the communist East and the capitalist West. Four guiding principles shaped Swiss security policy at that time, as Schellenberg explained: armed neutrality, autonomous national defence, the provision of good offices and the strict separation of internal and external security. The commitment to armed neutrality had been decisive in sparing Switzerland from the Second World War: by making a Full

Spectrum Army available, Switzerland was able to demonstrate credibly that no war party would cross its territory for bypass attacks.

Today a completely different picture presents itself: the strengthening of several military and economic powers with most diverse interests has led to the emergence of a multipolar world order. The threats have not only become more diverse, complex and unpredictable, but are also increasingly perceived. Switzerland's credible armed neutrality prevents a security vacuum in the centre of Europe and thus makes a considerable contribution to regional security and stability, the Deputy Chief of the Armed Forces emphasised.

The multi-agency approach at federal level

Corps Commander Schellenberg went on to explain how due to the global developments and risks the strict separation between internal and external security since the end of the Cold War has been replaced by a new, networked way of thinking. Today, many different actors at federal level have to deal with ever new security policy issues: The army, the police, border guards, the intelligence service, the Civil Protection, the Department of Development and Cooperation, the State Secretariat for Migration and the Department of Foreign Affairs are just some of them. These actors are linked by a close network of relationships and coordination. The changed performance and movement profile of the Swiss Armed Forces is also reflected in this dense network of relationships. The term "Swiss Security Network" has become established. However, the core issues of the armed forces remain the defence against a military threat, the protection of critical infrastructures, coping with the consequences of terrorist attacks and providing assistance in the event of natural disasters. Schellenberg emphasised that the principle of help, protect, fight was the guiding principle for the armed forces: "In the extreme case, when no one else comes, only the army comes".

Security as an interconnected task in the international arena

Schellenberg emphasised that Switzerland also cooperates closely with other actors at the international level, although it cannot enter into alliances with military obligations in peacetime because of its commitment to neutrality. However, there are numerous cooperations in the field of training. A good example is the training of fighter pilots in Great Britain, which is not possible in Switzerland due to the noise protection regulations.

Later in the panel, Lieutenant Colonel Peter Beschnidt from the General Staff also confirmed the importance of the multi-agency approach in the international arena. In contrast to neutral Switzerland, members of NATO could directly benefit from the expertise of the other member states, as in the example of the 1st German-Dutch Corps, in which 12 nations participate under the leadership of Germany and the Netherlands. Beschnidt points out that NATO as an alliance guarantees the reliability of the partner countries in military defence. At the same time, however, it is always a great challenge to coordinate and harmonise all processes.

Training and Equipment: potential perspectives

In his speech, Corps Commander Schellenberg addressed the major investment backlog in the Swiss Army on several occasions. The reasons for this are that the army budget has been continuously reduced for 20 years, which is why major replacement purchases have always had to be postponed. At the end of the 2020s, a large part of the equipment will therefore reach its tactical and technical lifespan, the corps commander explained. "As a result, for example, without renewal of the means to protect airspace, the air police service (maintenance of air sovereignty) and the defence of airspace can no longer be guaranteed". This also means that the principle of armed neutrality can no longer be credibly fulfilled.

At the same time, the Deputy Chief of the Armed Forces spoke of the important challenge of creating an understanding among the general population for the army's high financing requirements. A frequently heard argument was that there was no likely scenario in which Switzerland would have to defend its airspace or territory alone because it was surrounded by friendly neighbouring countries and NATO. At this point, the deputy army chief made it unmistakably clear: "Ladies and gentlemen, the army cannot and must not be guided by the probability of scenarios. It must always orient itself to the existing military potential in and around Europe. Even if there is no indication at present that this potential - or parts of it - is directed against Switzerland, Switzerland cannot wait for a concrete threat to arise before it takes steps to protect the country and its people. That is then much too late. The task of the armed forces is to be prepared for all possibilities, especially for the worst-case scenario". He noted, Schellenberg stated, that the population is often hardly aware of this perspective.

Military violence has become 'acceptable' again

Both Aldo C. Schellenberg and Peter Beschnidt agreed that with the annexation of the Crimea by Russian soldiers, the assertion of geostrategic interests by military force has become "acceptable" again. There had been a temporary international outcry. However, this did not have far-reaching consequences for Russia.

The Swiss deputy army chief sees the continued important deployment of conventional armed forces as a further learning from the Crimean annexation. Schellenberg is convinced that "boots on the ground" will continue to play a central role in the future - contrary to the widespread view that military conflicts will soon be conducted exclusively in cyberspace and airspace and by special forces. The new importance of military strength can also be seen regularly in the nuclear power struggle between the USA and North Korea and in the show of force actions of Russia and NATO.

Making security a topic of conversation

Securing the territory and protecting the population is the basis for all other aspects of security (public and civil security, cyber-security, legal and economic security, etc.), as Aldo C. Schellenberg pointed out. In opinion polls, the population always speaks positively of the army, but there is still a lack of awareness and understanding for concrete procurement projects. Peter Beschnidt added that unfortunately it often takes media events to create the necessary awareness for prevention and protection measures.

The panel participants as well as the audience agreed that in a next step security must again become a topic of discussion. In order to achieve this, in particular young people and women must be specifically involved through appropriate communication channels. This is exactly where the SWISS SECURITY FORUM will focus its actions on.

The SWISS SECURITY FORUM will roll out a broad information carpet to promote awareness of safety in Switzerland. In doing so, very different topics (as already mentioned) are to be taken up in a dialogue close to the citizens, SSF President Hans-Jürg Käser stated and added: "Ladies and gentlemen, security concerns all of us!"