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Autor:	Rusconi, Giuseppe
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The Federal Council's foreign policy report

Yes to Europe, to the UN and to neutrality

At the beginning of December, the Federal Council presented its "Report on Switzerland's Foreign Policy in the 1990s". Its main aims are as follows: entry into the European Union (EU), entry into the United Nations Organisation and close cooperation with NATO and the Western European Union (WEU). The most important section of the report deals with the adjustment of the policy of neutrality to the changed geo-political situation, particularly in Europe.

The report had been awaited with interest and some suspense, since it had been hoped – or perhaps feared – that it would include a date (the year 2000) for membership of the EU. This was not the case, however. The majority of ministers thought that in view of the unstable situation in Europe, uncertainty

Giuseppe Rusconi

about the intentions of EU members and the reticence of the Swiss population, it would be unwise to state a precise year for entry.

The Federal Council repeated its desire that Switzerland should join the EU eventually, however, while expressly minimising the importance of joining the European Economic Area and totally excluding the possibility of "going it alone".

Five guidelines

The report analyses the international situation, and five guidelines – or general



Switzerland's place in Europe is one of the focal points of the Federal Council's foreign policy report. (Photo: Keystone)

foreign policy targets – are laid down: maintaining and promoting security and peace; working in favour of human rights, democracy and the principles of the rule of law; promoting general prosperity; eliminating social inequality; protecting natural life-support systems.

In addition, the government describes Switzerland's non-membership of the

UN and the EU as a situation "which in the shorter or longer term will be harmful to the maintenance of national interests and development opportunities and could weaken Switzerland's position in the world".

"New" neutrality

The Federal Council is "convinced" that "in the present phase of transition and uncertainty" the policy of neutrality can still be useful to national interests. But it must be a type of neutrality which is considered as an instrument – and no longer as a dogma – of security policy, intended to serve international solidarity in a peaceful future. In consequence, the "new" neutrality should be limited to two distinct areas: renunciation of direct participation in armed conflicts,

and a military policy geared solely towards national defence.

According to the Federal Council, such neutrality is entirely compatible with UN membership, with participation in UN economic sanctions while not opposing military sanctions and with the creation of a unit of Swiss blue helmets. For the government, neutrality understood in this way would not be an obstacle to membership of the EU as it is today, nor would it stand in the way of functional cooperation with NATO and the WEU (Switzerland in an observer capacity perhaps). In this connection, the Federal Council stresses that it is in Switzerland's interest to participate in building a safe Europe. "In the event that the European Union achieves its aim of establishing a joint, sound and permanent defence structure, our country must be prepared to examine the foundations of its separate neutrality" ... which would then become a useless instrument. Will this really ever be the case? ■

The Swiss Abroad and European integration

In the wake of the No to the EEA by Swiss voters on December 6, 1992, Swiss Review launched an appeal to all Swiss Abroad living in Europe to report to the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad any administrative difficulties they might encounter which were due to Switzerland's policy on European integration.

As a result, letters came in from all over Europe reporting discrimination, with particular emphasis on the following areas: residence and work permits, recognition of degrees and access to universities, social security benefits and customs matters.

The whole file has been handed over to the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs so that the individual needs of Swiss Abroad may be taken into account during the bilateral negotiations on Switzerland's future position. The SSA and Swiss diplomatic posts will be very pleased to receive more letters on this subject.

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