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Report on the Brunner Commission

For a more active Switzerland on the international stage

Switzerland should become involved in a collective effort in favour of peace, cooperate at the international level in the struggle against certain dangers, and continually adapt its security arrangements to the development of such threats. Those are the three main lines of the report published last February by the Brunner Commission.

This Commission had as its task the elaboration of general lines of conduct in security and military policy for the Switzerland of the beginning of the next century. In fact the government has not waited until the present to adapt

Pierre-André Tschanz

its external and security policies to the transformations brought about by the disappearance of the Iron Curtain and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Its line of conduct has been described in two reports: security policy in 1990 and foreign policy in 1993. The report of the Brunner Commission is directly aligned with these two documents. Its purpose is to give a new impulse to realising this reform, in particular after the failure of the project to create a contingent of Swiss Blue Helmets in 1994.

While stating in the preamble that it is impossible to foresee with certainty how the international situation will develop in the next quarter of a century, the Commission states that Switzerland today finds itself in a wider space of security and that the challenges to which it must face up, like all countries, are concerned with organised crime, terrorism, the wild spread of nuclear, biological, chemical and electronic arms, as well as big migratory flows. The threats and dangers resulting from armed conflicts between the states that surround us, or from aggression on their part, are today highly improbable. The hour, states the Brunner Commission, is one of cooperation between states and it

is in contributing to strengthening that process of cooperation that Switzerland may best protect its vital interests.

Forget old reticences

In its own well understood interest Switzerland must go beyond the old reticences in the face of any international and European commitment to guarantee its security no longer only by maintaining a strong autonomous military defence, but also by cooperating with its neighbours and with the organisations and alliances which surround it: the European Union, NATO and the United Nations, as well as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Partnership for Peace, and the Council of Europe.

A particular accent should be put on cooperation in the field of satellite reconnaissance and supervision of air space (an idea already launched in the 1980s in the framework of the CSCE by secretary of State Edouard Brunner), as well as in the field of education. The Commission recommends a rapprochement with the European security area. A reorientation and readaptation of the army and its armament in view of new priorities, while safeguarding a military and industrial know-how which may be reactivated at any moment and readapted to the development of threats and new technologies.

In regard of non-military threats the Commission recommends that priority be given to reducing the causes of migration, to international efforts in the fields of cooperation and development, and humanitarian aid and assistance in the case of disaster, protection of human rights, and stabilisation measures, also the participation of Switzerland in efforts to prevent possible economic pressure, including corruption.

Solidarity in the field

Switzerland must show its solidarity in the field, not only financially and verbally. In order to do this it must create a corps of professionals and part-time people, specially trained and equipped, capable of intervening in assistance missions and in support of civilians. The present corps of yellow and blue berets as well as the new Swiss Solidarity corps should be armed for their own defence and given means of transport making autonomous movement possible.

Flexible and pragmatic

The Commission wishes to avoid a basic debate on the maintenance, or not, of armed neutrality. It recommends that the present road of flexible and pragmatic application of neutrality should be pursued, considered as a means of preserving our interests, and not as an end in itself. Neutrality should in no case become an obstacle to the necessary commitments for our security and our dignity as a responsible state, underlines the Brunner Commission in its report. Finally, regarding the army, the Commission believes that it should be better adapted to the present functioning of society and should be supplemented for certain tasks by professional or partially professional units (groups of specialists for tasks using sophisticated technology, intervention bodies for high risk missions and a «Swiss Solidarity Corps»). In the field of intelligence it is a security council directly attached to the President of the Confederation which is proposed. ■

The Brunner Commission

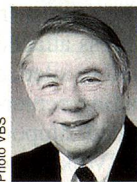


Photo VBS

Presided by the former eminence grise of Swiss foreign policy and of the Conference on security and cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the study commission for strategic questions was set up in August 1996 by Adolf Ogi, the head of the Federal Military Department. It included 41 persons from the most varied fields (politics, economics, military, the media). Its report was approved by all members present, with the exception of national Councillor Christoph Blocher, president of the Zurich branch of the UDC.