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General Defense— a Question of Political Confidence

Summary of National Councillor François Jeanneret's lecture given to the assembly of the delegates of the Swiss Civil Defense Association on 27 August 1988 in Neuchâtel, in his function as President of the General Defense Council.

The basis for creating confidence in our general defense is information. To this the general defense council contributes by pointing, in a language easy to understand, to certain fundamental principles. General defense can only be understood by tracing back to its origin and the nature of our institutions. These rest on 4 pillars: the past, direct democracy, federalism and our militia army.

These four supporting elements must be imparted and represented by information in an up-to-date language.

Concerning security policy and general defense we first have to agree on the terms. Switzerland as a nation pursues a security policy – same as a traffic and energy policy – with the object of remaining a free and independent state. General defense means organization and coordination of civilian and military means and measures for the attainment of the security-political objectives as laid down in article 3 of our Federal Constitution.

General defense is neither new, nor abstract or revolutionary. It is the result of a natural development of our means for the maintenance of independency and sovereignty of our country, and in this sense the adaptation of proved given facts to a changed situation. The world has changed: we follow this development without renouncing essentials as our will to remain free and independent.

How does this system work in detail? To begin with we have to distinguish between the concept and the organization. The concept as laid down in the Federal Council's Report of 27 June 1973 is still valid. It has been confirmed by the intermediate report of 3 December 1979. Together with other reports on military defense, civil defense and the territorial organization it forms a coherent whole.

The organization of general defense is based on the federal law of 27 June

1969 on the leadership organization and the general defense council. The implementation of general defense is incumbent on the Federal Council. To this purpose it disposes of special offices, namely

- the Central Office of General Defense and
 - the General Defense Staff.
- Further it disposes of militia organs, i.e.
- the Federal Defense Council and
 - the Cantons and Communities.

The total organization is regularly checked within the scope of general defense exercises, in regional exercises

and various courses. In order to guarantee a reliable operation of this instrument, the responsible people must be trained and the organization coordinated. As a whole, general defense works well.

However, the information of the population still shows deficiencies. An analysis of the 1984 general defense exercise revealed that certain items need improvement, among which we found the outwards information.

With reservation as to the necessity of secrecy it is indispensable that the population knows why such an exercise is carried out and what conclusions have to be drawn. Parallel with this we have to follow up in the best possible pragmatic and realistic manner *women's participation* in general defense. Other topics occupying the general defense council are a service for the maintenance of order, the development of threat and peace movements. In general the principles of our security policy need no fundamental changes; however, they must be adapted to new or changed conditions and situations. Another hurdle to be taken is the extension of our security policy to all domains of life. We must delimitate precisely what belongs to security policy and what not. For instance any prevention in connection with pollution control has to be exempted from the term «security policy».

General defense must remain one of the priority tasks of our nation, according to its importance for securing the independence of our country. ▀

Levels of Threat

