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Interview

ush. National Councillor François Jeanneret, Neuchâtel, comments upon the work of the General Defense Council. He presides over the Council since 1 January 1982. The Council numbers 20 to 25 members.

■ The General Defense Council is an advisory organ of the Federal Council (the Swiss Government). What does this mean?

The Council is a militia body like any other commission, at the Federal Council's disposal for special matters or projects. We—and now I'm speaking in my function as president of the council—thus furnish the Government with suggestions and supplementary data in order to support its political work—this of course mainly for questions touching general defense.

■ Are the topics or the field of work being prescribed for the Council?

Partly they result from the subject "General Defense"; lately however the Council has handled many questions on its own initiative and has supplied the Federal Council of its own accord with propositions or stimulating suggestions.

■ The Council works "in camera", i.e. the citizen knows nothing of its existence.

Do you agree to this?

It is not absolutely necessary that everybody knows of the existence and work of the General Defense Council, or of the leadership organization. I am not saying this because I would not take the "man in the street", i.e. my fellow-citizens seriously, but in my opinion it is far more important to know the idea of general defense and its concept respectively. On the other hand those responsible people dealing professionally or due to political necessity with this matter, must have increased knowledge of general defense's "infrastructure", its conception and object.

You may note that since general defense has been organized, it works more or less well—i.e. in the cantons, on federal level, on the civilian or military side. General defense exercises, carried



National Councillor
François Jeanneret, Neuchâtel

out every four years, beside of being a training, have the side-effect of informing the population on the structure and concept of general defense—and this via reporting through the greatest possible number of all media. In this respect I can give the media quite good marks for their reports covering the 1988 General Defense Exercise.

But the council in itself represents an advisory organ—or if you prefer an auxiliary organ—of the Federal Council. We do not aim at being at any price "in the limelight". We are at the disposal of the Federal Council, and furthermore we naturally commit ourselves by lectures, publications, and similar activities. "We" means the members of the general defense council and me as its president. Now back to the main point: security and general defense politics or policy are handled by the Federal Council, not by us.

■ Then which are the special tasks to be fulfilled by the general defense council only, and how may its existence be legitimated?

I believe that the council is the only agency which can submit to the Federal

Council proposals in an absolute free manner, as long as they concern the organization of general defense. For example: The General Defense Exercise of 1988 is being evaluated by a special office. The general defense council however issues its own complete report on its experience around and within this exercise. During the running four years, i.e. until the next general defense exercise shall be carried out, we shall follow up all evaluated items, and thereby exert pressure on an improvement of present unsatisfactory situations.

■ Which were in the council president's view the most important questions and topics dealt with during the past term of office?

Here we must surely mention the check and review of the Central Office of General Defense. Further a report on Swiss policy of neutrality has been worked out in a seminar and submitted to the Federal Council—this in cooperation with the Department of Foreign Affairs. I also believe that the question of Swiss Integration into the European economical system is very important, especially important in view of possible effects on Switzerland by the creation of a European home market.

■ Which are the focal points envisaged by the general defense council in the years to come?

Undoubtedly a very important item will be Switzerland's security policy in Europe which has to show a certain relationship to the European security policy. This aspect was treated for example—although in a special form—within the general defense exercise of 1988. A second one is the improvement of the position of our home security policy, or more precisely of its position within the federal administration. □

