

Switzerland

The Brussels' Christmas goose is looking for money

Europeans have proven themselves to be stupid and rich

by Ralph Bosshard*



Ralph Bosshard (Photo nachdenkseiten.de)

The appearance of the new US administration in Munich and Brussels, the scandal between US President Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House, and the spectacular offensive of the Russian army in the Kursk area have sent shockwaves through Europe and caused almost panicky reactions.

The belated realisation that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine cannot be resolved militarily would actually force a rethink. Some trans Atlanticist are facing a difficult turnaround, and some have already made it clear that they are not prepared to do so.

Today, Switzerland is facing the question of re-equipping the Swiss army in the context of the current geopolitical situation. This discussion should probably be seen first and foremost as a shadow-boxing fight, in which the aim is to squeeze more money out of politics for the army. Even after the resounding success of the Russian army in the Kursk Bulge and even after the imminent expansion of the Russian armed forces to possibly 2.5 million men in the coming years, there is still no military threat to Switzerland from Russia. It is also hard to imagine that the General Staff headquarters on Moscow's Arbat would perceive Switzerland as a threat. However, in recent years, politicians and the press have not presented any other enemy images than Russia.

Last year's *annual report of the Federal Intelligence Service*, which was prepared in cooperation with the *Military Intelligence Service*, does



A militia army and its permanent armed neutrality are a secure foundation for the country's future. (Picture ma)

not mention the possibility of a military attack by Russia on Switzerland.¹

In light of the practice of military procurement projects in recent years, the view of the political left in Switzerland, which doubts that Switzerland would be able to spend additional funds on armaments in a meaningful way, is probably quite justified. The current threat is based on a bogeyman. This could soon disappear. In this respect, the sense of panic buying in the arms market is questionable.

But even if one could see a reason behind Switzerland's rearmament, the question arises as to how it can maintain its neutrality and expand its military strength at the same time. Hopefully, Switzerland's political leadership has learned its lesson from the past three years and understands that the Swiss Army's procurement plans are of the lowest priority for defence contractors in Western Europe and the United States, and that in the event of an emerging war in Europe, a rearmament of the Swiss Army will fail because all other customers will be served first.²

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Switzerland to the OSCE, as Senior Planning Officer in the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and as an operations officer in the OSCE High-Level Planning Group. Ralph Bosshard's civilian profession is historian (MA, University of Zurich).

See also: Ralph Bosshard, *Armed Neutrality and the Swiss Army*, «Swiss Standpoint».

It is possible that Switzerland will have to consider suppliers from outside Europe for new purchases in the future, because the outbreak of a war around the world is considerably less likely than a regional war in Europe. But of course, when it comes to armaments deals worth billions, countertrade deals are always welcome, and these are best done with Switzerland's European neighbours.

NATO wars financed by Switzerland?

Before discussing the increase of military spending in Switzerland to 3–5 percent of the GDP, as the German politician *Roderich Kiesewetter* recently suggested,³ we should be aware of what this would mean: it would amount to almost 40 billion francs and almost half of the current federal budget. The federal government's spending on the army will grow by an average of 4.5 per cent by the end of the current financial planning period, mainly due to the intended increase in defence spending.⁴

The idea of Roderich Kiesewetter and his transatlantic colleagues is probably based primarily on the fact that the Swiss spend these sums primarily on weapons from their countries, notably those that have not proven themselves in Ukraine over the last three years.⁵ In addition, the increase in arms procurement entails the risk that the Swiss army will not have enough money to finance the training of the equipment, meaning that it would have to be decommissioned de facto.

Mr Kiesewetter was apparently not enough brazen to suggest that Switzerland transfer 30 billion francs a year as an *outright donation* to NATO, so that it can continue to finance its global wars and corruption in Ukraine. Instead, Mr Kiesewetter simply proposes a cross-subsidy through arms purchases.

One would think that the Swiss would be able to assess their own national security issues. But only Mr Kiesewetter, who would have had the chance to participate in the development of the *German National Security Strategy* in 2023 and let the opportunity pass unused, can answer why he believes he should teach others.⁶

Swiss weapons as a game changer? Hardly!

In the hope that they would invigorate Swiss policy, the most zealous trans Atlanticists have begun to put pressure on Swiss suppliers to the European industry, in particular with the threat

that they would no longer consider Swiss companies if Switzerland created obstacles to the re-export of weapons systems with Swiss components. The 35mm ammunition for anti-aircraft guns is still cited as a prime example.⁷

However, this argument is not very convincing, because Switzerland would in any case not be able to meet the dramatically increasing demand for ammunition and spare parts in the event of war. Of course, the Swiss industry would like to get a slice of the 800-billion-euro defence cake in Europe. But Switzerland is not a suitable location for arms production, not only because of restrictive legislation on arms exports.

It is therefore not surprising that Switzerland does not have a defence industry of its own to speak of. Last year, the share of Switzerland's total economic output accounted for by arms production was just over 0.1 per cent, and it accounts for only 0.6 per cent of the country's total industrial output.⁸ To claim that Ukraine would lose the war against Russia without Swiss supplies is pure demagoguery.

Switzerland cannot ensure the production of weapons and equipment for its own army in its own country, as its own needs are too small. It is also not in a position to act as a supplier of proven weapons systems on the international arms market because its equipment has hardly ever been in combat anywhere. This is what happened to the Swiss, for example, with the *Panzer 68* and, more recently, with the *Sturmgewehr 90 assault rifle*, which is on a par with other Western models.⁹

Furthermore, Swiss legislation on arms exports is quite strict. The Swiss are well advised to refrain from anything that might make them look like war profiteers, like a country that profits from wars and the misfortunes of other countries from a position of safety.

Europe: a silly, fat Christmas goose

In the face of current geopolitical tensions, there is no reason for Switzerland to give up its neutrality, as it has alternative ways of ensuring its own security without relying on military blocs. This calls into question the very existence of NATO and angers Brussels to such an extent that it has no choice but to press Switzerland to its side.

Switzerland can best ensure its security by not allowing itself to be coerced by the free-riding

imperialists in its neighbourhood into participating in wars that are not its own.

Ukraine wanted to drag the world into a war against Russia over Crimea, and now Western Europeans are realising with dismay that the US is no longer willing to help or finance their geopolitical ambitions.

This is the reason for the now rampant panic in Western Europe, where it is beginning to dawn on many leading politicians – albeit with some delay – that the idea of resolving the Ukraine conflict on the battlefield was not feasible and that they will no longer be listened to on one of the most important issues in current global politics.

Outside Europe, some have probably long since realised that even belonging to the world's strongest military alliance on paper is no guarantee of military security. Over the past ten years, a politically united Europe has failed to take constructive initiatives to resolve a conflict from a secure military position that could be repeated in a similar form in numerous other places on the Eurasian continent. The Europeans have proven themselves to be foolish and rich – an ideal victim to be gutted like a Christmas goose.

Source: <https://globalbridge.ch/die-bruesseler-weihnachtsgans-sucht-geld/>, 21 March 2025

(Translation "Swiss-Standpoint")

- ¹ See "Switzerland's Security 2024": The Federal Intelligence Service publishes its new security report, Bern, 22 October 2024, available online at <https://www.admin.ch/gov/en/start/documentation/media-releases.msg-id-102858.html>.
- ² The delay in the delivery of the "Patriot" anti-aircraft missiles to Switzerland led to a debate last year. For an example of this, see "Delayed arms deliveries. Switzerland is also affected by 'Ukraine first'", in Tages Anzeiger, 21 June 2024, online at <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/ukraine-first-usa-verzoegern-ruestungslieferungen-an-andere-laender-211818547689>.
- ³ See "Kritik aus dem Norden: Deutschland hat genug von der Schweizer 'Mini-Aufrüstung'", by Watson, 9 March 2025, online at <https://www.watson.ch/schweiz/international/552481553-die-schweiz-ruestet-zu-wenig-auf-sagen-die-deutschen>. See also Simone Brunner, Matthias Daum and Sarah Jäggi: Zwei Löcher im Donut, in ZEIT online Nr. 11/2025, 12 March 2025, online at <https://www.zeit.de/2025/11/militaer-oesterreich-schweiz-ver->

teidigungsfaehigkeit-europa. With the Austrian Armed Forces' four land brigades currently on active service, it would be hard to speak of a military weakness in comparison to neighbouring countries. Cf "Organisation" at homepage of ÖBH (Austrian Federal Army), online at <https://www.bundesheer.at/unser-heer/organisation>. The same applies to Switzerland with its 3 mechanised brigades and the 4 territorial divisions, with a de facto strength of a brigade.

- ⁴ See "Expenditure" at the homepage of the Federal Finance Administration FFA, online at https://www.efv.admin.ch/efv/en/home/finanzberichterstattung/bundeshaushalt_ueb/ausgaben.html and "Federal finances at a glance" Financial Statements 2025", as PDF file *ibid.* available.
- ⁵ Symptomatic of this is Patrick Zwerger: Old F-16s have no chance against Russia's Su-35S? in "Flug Revue", 14 March 2025, online at <https://www.flugrevue.de/militaer/ukrainische-luftwaffe-ernuechert-alte-f-16-ohne-chance-gegen-russlands-su-35s/>.
- ⁶ At the public hearing of the German Bundestag on 19 June 2023, the author of this strategy paper made an unequivocal statement in which he recommended that the paper be rejected by the federal government. See homepage of the German Bundestag: "Auswärtiges, Nationale Sicherheitsstrategie stösst auf geteiltes Echo", 19 June 2023, online at <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2023/kw25-pa-auswaertiges-sicherheitsstrategie-952500>, incl. video at minute 1 h 40' ff.
- ⁷ Cf, for example, Saya Bausch, Christian Rensch: How important is Swiss ammunition for the Gepard tank?, on SRF News, 28 April 2022, online at <https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/waffenlieferungen-im-krieg-wie-wichtig-ist-die-schweizer-munition-fuer-den-gepard-panzer>.
- ⁸ See "Die volkswirtschaftliche Bedeutung der Schweizer Rüstungsindustrie Studie im Auftrag des Staatssekretariats für Wirtschaft SECO Basel, September 2021", edit. by BAK Economics AG, online at <https://www.news.admin.ch/newsd/message/attachments/70745.pdf>.
- ⁹ The Swiss defence industry was unable to rectify the numerous defects in the *Panzer 68* before a new generation of tanks, superior to the *Panzer 68*, which was designed in the early 1960s, became available on the arms market. These deficiencies had come to light during training operations in the Swiss Army. See "Deficiencies in the Panzer 68; report of the committee on its clarifications and conclusions of the Military Commission of the National Council of 17 September 1979" online at <https://www.amtsdruckschriften.bar.admin.ch/viewOrigDoc.do?id=10047830>. The *Schweizerische Industrie-Gesellschaft* (SIG) «Sturmgewehr 90» assault rifle, which is highly accurate by international standards and very easy to handle, was procured in small numbers by the special forces of Germany, France, the United States, India and Egypt, as well as by the Saudi Arabian navy.