

Popular initiative "Safeguarding Swiss neutrality"

Council of States rejects neutrality initiative but wants to enshrine neutrality more clearly in the Federal Constitution

by Dr. phil. René Roca, member of the initiative committee*



René Roca gives a lecture in Frauenfeld. (Picture sv)

(CH-S) On 20 and 21 June 2025, René Roca, a long-standing high school teacher and historian with a doctorate, presented his views on the significance of the neutrality initiative for our country at the "Swiss Standpoint" association in Frauenfeld and discussed them in detail with the participants. In his presentation, he outlined several key historical events that have helped to keep our country out of war and maintain internal and external peace over the last 200 years.

The following article contains René Roca's comments on the current state of the parliamentary debates on the popular initiative, which he has written down for us.

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Two committees of the Council of States dealt with the neutrality initiative [in May/June]. The Security Policy Committee (SPC-S) did not discuss the matter at length, closely following the Federal Council's message and rejected the initiative without a counter-proposal.

The Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC-S) took the matter more seriously. It postponed the internal vote on the neutrality initiative three times, apparently discussed the proposal intensively, con-

sulted experts and studied numerous sources on Swiss neutrality.

Dealing with an issue raised by the population in this way, and not, as is often mistakenly written, by a party headquarters, is an excellent example of the *pre-emptive effect* of direct democracy. A popular initiative triggers debate and fundamental reflection. In the FAC-S, this also included discussing a direct counterproposal alongside the initiative. Both were ultimately rejected but a good foundation had now been laid for a debate in the Council of States that was as objective as possible.

On 19 June, at the parliamentary summer session, the Council of States then spent three hours discussing the neutrality initiative. The votes of the members of the Council of States varied in terms of content. Overall, however, the issue was discussed seriously, as was the direct counterproposal that the FAC-S had introduced and then previously rejected. The neutrality initiative was ultimately rejected, but the direct counterproposal was accepted. The Federal Constitution is to be amended as follows:

"Art. 54a Swiss neutrality

1 Switzerland is neutral. Its neutrality is permanent and armed.

2 The Confederation shall use its neutrality to ensure the independence and security of Switzerland, to prevent conflicts or to contribute to their resolution. It shall be available as a mediator."

Paragraph 1 is the same as in the official referendum. Paragraphs 2 and 3 have been deleted. Paragraph 4 has been adopted and even supplemented.

In the popular initiative, the fourth paragraph reads as follows:

"Switzerland shall use its permanent neutrality to prevent and resolve conflicts and shall be available as a mediator."

In paragraph 2 of the counter-proposal, the emphasis on the *protective effect* of neutrality for Switzerland's independence and security is an

* Dr phil. René Roca is a high school teacher, Doctor of History and member of the initiative committee "Safeguarding Swiss Neutrality" (Neutrality Initiative). He founded and is head of the *Research Institute direkte Demokratie* (www.fidd.ch).

important addition. However, this addition does not in any way compensate for the paragraphs deleted from the initiative text!

Paragraphs 2 and 3 of the initiative text contain essential requirements for defining Swiss neutrality unambiguously:

Paragraph 2 stipulates that Switzerland shall not join any military or defence alliance. Paragraph 3 formulates the principle that Switzerland shall not participate in military conflicts between third countries and shall also refrain from taking non-military coercive measures against belligerent states.

These clarifications are fundamental to the integral and comprehensive neutrality that was once taken for granted and should now be enshrined in the Federal Constitution. Only if Switzerland breaks off its long-standing political and military rapprochement with the NATO military alliance and no longer supports economic

sanctions will it be regarded as a neutral country again abroad.

It is now up to the National Council to decide on the initiative and the counterproposal during its autumn session from 8 to 26 September. If this council also approves the direct counterproposal, both will be put to a vote at the same time – but only if the 27-member initiative committee does not withdraw the initiative.

It must be clear that Article 54a, as proposed in the initiative, can only credibly enshrine Swiss neutrality in the Federal Constitution if paragraphs 1–4 are included in their entirety. This is the basis that obliges our government and parliament to recommit to neutrality for peace in the world and to offer their services as a neutral mediator in crisis situations. On this basis, our country will also be able to rebuild its good offices and successfully support the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).