

Neutrality initiative

Background information

The initiative was launched by the association “Pro Schweiz” (with SVP figures, driven substantially by former Federal Councillor Christoph Blocher) shortly after Switzerland's adoption of the EU sanctions against Russia, and was submitted on 11 April 2024 with 129,806 valid signatures.

The initiative in brief

The following article would be added to the federal constitution:

BV 54a¹

1. Switzerland is neutral. Its neutrality is perpetual and armed.
2. Switzerland shall not join any military or defence alliance. Cooperation with such alliances is reserved for the event of a direct military attack on Switzerland or of actions in preparation of such an attack.
3. Switzerland shall not participate in military conflicts between third states and shall not adopt non-military coercive measures against belligerent states. Obligations towards the United Nations (UN) as well as measures to prevent the circumvention of non-military coercive measures of other states are reserved.
4. Switzerland shall use its perpetual neutrality for the prevention and resolution of conflicts and shall make itself available as a mediator.

What is already current law, and what would be new

The concept of neutrality is not new to the Constitution. Already in 1848, Switzerland's first Federal Constitution referred to it in the provisions on the powers of the Federal Assembly and the Federal Council, which are instructed to take “measures to safeguard... the neutrality of Switzerland” (Art. 173 para. 1 and Art. 185 para. 1 of today's Constitution).² The Federal Council notes that essential demands of the initiative already correspond to current law and practice:³ Switzerland is permanently neutral, does not join any military alliance, does not participate in wars between third states, adopts all UN sanctions (as a UN member it is obliged to do so) and uses its neutrality for mediation.

Materially new would be two points:

- Sanctions ban: Sanctions against belligerent states outside the UN (e.g. coordinated with the EU) would be prohibited.

¹ Initiative text, [Fedlex](#)

² Factsheet: Neutrality in the Federal Constitution, [FDFA](#)

³ Neutrality Initiative, [FDFA](#)

- Cooperation ban: Cooperation with military and defence alliances would be restricted to the event of an attack or an imminent threat thereof.

Summary

The initiative would leave most of current neutrality practice untouched. Materially new are only two things: a sanctions ban (no non-UN sanctions) and a cooperation ban (no cooperation with defence alliances outside an actual or imminent attack) (p. 2–3).

Pro arguments

- Strict neutrality offers predictability and equal treatment of all parties, in place of decisions taken case by case (p. 9)
- The initiative removes the legal ambiguity of today's flexible practice, where the line between permitted and prohibited conduct is drawn case by case (p. 10–11)
- The older view in the mediation literature holds that impartiality is what makes a third country acceptable as a host and mediator (p. 14)

Con arguments

- Swiss neutrality has never been fixed. It moved from integral to differential application and back again, and the full adoption of the EU sanctions in 2022 changed the practice but not the legal core (p. 6–7)
- What the initiative removes is the case-by-case choice codified in the Embargo Act. It does not make Switzerland more neutral than it can already choose to be (p. 11, 15)
- It hands effective control over Swiss sanctions decisions to the UN Security Council, where Russia and China hold a veto. In 2022 Switzerland could not have adopted any sanctions at all (p. 9, 12). This decreases Switzerland's autonomy.
- Switzerland does not "simply adopt" foreign sanctions: in 2014 it declined the EU's Crimea sanctions, in 2022 it decided the other way (p. 12, 15)
- The circumvention clause leaves unresolved legal questions, and enforcing it effectively would be a "Herculean task" (p. 12)
- As a financial centre and commodity hub, Switzerland risks being seen as a circumvention platform, inviting countermeasures from the EU and US secondary sanctions. A stricter neutrality also weakens confidence in Swiss arms manufacturers as export partners (p. 12–13)
- The initiative adds no capability Switzerland lacks. Mediation is granted by the conflict parties, not earned by constitutional text (Türkiye, Camp David, Dayton) (p. 13)
- A state that can never react to anything, including wars of aggression, risks being read not as principled but as indifferent (p. 15)
- It would probably end NATO cooperation that today is voluntary, self-directed and limited to domains Switzerland chooses: cyber defence, interoperability, IHL and security policy training, and peacekeeping in Kosovo (p. 15–18)
- Cooperation cannot be built once signs of an attack appear; the Federal Council considers a security-policy go-it-alone approach not viable (p. 17–18)
- Polling does not support the claim that the government has drifted from the population: 71% consider the Russia sanctions right, 64% consider them compatible with neutrality, and 56% support closer NATO cooperation (p. 13, 18)

- Sweden's record shows neutrality has always been adapted to circumstances rather than fixed in advance (p. 19–22)

Unclear arguments

- Support for maintaining neutrality as a principle remains high, at 85% (p. 8). It remains unclear if this support is for the general and more strict neutrality idea or the current neutrality policy. As the survey question was phrased in terms of “keeping the current neutrality” this could also be interpreted as a position for a more flexible approach and against the strictness the initiative would create.

Short history of swiss neutrality

Why and how did Switzerland become neutral?

The battle at Marignano is often viewed as the beginning of Swiss neutrality, as the defeat ended Switzerland's expansionist ambitions in northern Italy. Switzerland's own Historical Lexicon cautions, however, that the popular story of Marignano as a single formative "lesson" is a simplified narrative popularised only in the 19th and 20th centuries. The actual shift toward the long-standing policy of "sitting still" is better explained by the internal splits caused by the Reformation and a further string of defeats through 1525, at Bicocca, Sesia and Pavia, together with the mounting toll of mercenary service.^{4, 5} Over the following centuries, staying out of other state wars became a way to hold together a country increasingly divided by language and religious tensions. The status was formalised internationally in 1815, when the European powers recognised Swiss neutrality at the Congress of Vienna and then guaranteed it under international law at the Second Peace of Paris, in the Declaration of 20 November 1815, declaring that "the neutrality and inviolability of Switzerland, and her independence of all foreign influence, enter into the true interests of the policy of the whole of Europe."⁶ From the outset it was understood as a means to preserve independence and internal cohesion, never as an end in itself.⁷ The legal core of that status was codified almost a century later, in the Hague Convention respecting the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers of 1907, which remains the reference point for neutrality law today.⁸ The next chapter covers the shifting interpretations and practices of Swiss neutrality in detail.

How did the interpretation of swiss neutrality change over time?

Neutrality has been a malleable concept, subject to functional reinterpretation over time. Though Switzerland remained outside the First World War, it leveraged this position to issue formal declarations of neutrality to all belligerents.⁹ The postwar period witnessed Switzerland's strategic navigation of a seeming paradox: it acceded to the League of Nations and offered its "good offices" as a neutral mediator, whilst simultaneously securing recognition of its permanent neutrality. In this way, Switzerland forged a novel reconciliation between multilateral engagement and its traditional non-alignment. Between 1918 and 1938, the concept of neutrality was tested and changed from "integral" to a "differential" application, and back again. Until 1938 Switzerland was exempted from joining military sanctions but not from economic ones, a practice that came to be known as

⁴ De Weck, Hervé: Schlacht von Marignano, [HLS](#) (no English version available).

⁵ Jorio, Marco: Die Schweiz und ihre Neutralität, p. 43. (cit. "*Die Legende, wonach die Neutralität auf dem Schlachtfeld von Marignano entstanden sei, wurde erst um 1900 erfunden. (...) ... erst während der Geistigen Landesverteidigung und im Kalten Krieg setzte sich der Mythos Marignano (...) durch.*")

⁶ Treaty of Paris (1815)/Act on the neutrality of Switzerland, [Wikisource](#) (original booked linked on wikisource; wikisource preferred due to readability).

⁷ Clarity and guidance on neutrality policy, [National Council](#) (Ch. Background).

⁸ Abkommen betreffend die Rechte und Pflichten der neutralen Mächte und Personen im Falle eines Landkriegs, [fedflex](#) (no English version available).

⁹ Jorio, Die Schweiz und ihre Neutralität, p. 184-185.

“differential neutrality.”¹⁰ By 1938, the League of Nations' diplomatic authority had mostly collapsed, as demonstrated most starkly by the Munich Agreement, which saw Britain and France capitulate to German territorial expansion. Following approval with the League of Nations' Council, Switzerland reverted to its pre-War “integral neutrality”-policy.¹¹ This means for action defined Switzerland's foreign policy throughout the Second World War, and afterwards was, in the Federal Council's own words, “essentially deemed equivalent to a state doctrine” through the Cold War. From around 1960 onwards this broad understanding gradually narrowed again. Switzerland joined NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1996,¹² adopted the Embargo Act in 2002, giving the Federal Council a case-by-case legal basis to adopt sanctions of the UN, the OSCE or its main trading partners, and joined the UN by popular vote the same year.¹³ The full adoption of the EU sanctions against Russia in 2022¹⁴ can be seen as a shift in Swiss neutrality practice, but not in its legal core. The full adoption of the EU sanctions against Russia¹⁵ can be viewed as shift in the Swiss neutrality practices, but not in the legal core.

Was/Is Swiss neutrality a success?

Neutrality kept Switzerland mostly out of both world wars and, in the words of the Federal Council's own historical review, helped to preserve “internal cohesion, which linguistic, regional and denominational tensions had previously threatened to erode,” particularly under the strain of the First World War.¹⁶ It also turned Geneva and the good offices into a lasting diplomatic asset.¹⁷ The record is not spotless, though: the country's economic dealings with Nazi Germany and its restrictive refugee policy during the Second World War, later documented by the Bergier Commission, remain a serious qualification to the success story and how much it can be attributed to neutrality.¹⁸

Public support for the neutrality principle itself has stayed high, but it is not fixed: 97% of the population favoured maintaining neutrality in early 2022. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine that figure fell by eight points to 89% by mid-2022.¹⁹ By January 2026, support for maintaining neutrality as such still stood at 85%, but beneath the surface, a more complex image is unfolding- a record 59% of voters currently doubts that armed neutrality can still be credibly defended by military means, only 54% believe that neutrality protects

¹⁰ Clarity and guidance on neutrality policy, [National Council](#) (Ch. 4.1).

¹¹ Letter from Giuseppe Motta to Lord Robert Cecil, Neutralité de la Confédération suisse dans le cadre de la Société des Nations, in: Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland, <https://dodis.ch/54194>.

¹² Clarity and guidance on neutrality policy, [National Council](#) (Ch. 3.4)

¹³ Clarity and guidance on neutrality policy, [National Council](#) (Ch. 4.1 & Annex 1)

¹⁴ «Kooperative Neutralität»: Cassis überrascht mit neuem Begriff, [srf.ch](https://www.srf.ch)

¹⁵ Clarity and guidance on neutrality policy, [National Council](#) (Ch. 5.1)

¹⁶ Clarity and guidance on neutrality policy, [National Council](#) (Ch. 4.1)

¹⁷ Clarity and guidance on neutrality policy, [National Council](#) (Ch. 3.1)

¹⁸ Switzerland, National Socialism and the Second World War, [uek.ch](https://www.uek.ch)

¹⁹ Sicherheit 2026, [Militärakademie \(MILAK\) an der ETH Zürich und Center for Security Studies \(CSS\), ETH Zürich](#) (P. 155).

Switzerland from international conflict (lowest ever), and a record 43% believe that membership in a European defence alliance would provide more security than neutrality does.²⁰ That being said, there is also a record low of people believing that Switzerland should choose a side in an foreign conflict (except military ones) at 50% and a 26 years high at 30% for the statement that Switzerland should choose sides in foreign military conflicts.²¹

²⁰ Sicherheit 2026, [Militärakademie \(MILAK\) an der ETH Zürich und Center for Security Studies \(CSS\), ETH Zürich](#) (P. 161).

²¹ Sicherheit 2026, [Militärakademie \(MILAK\) an der ETH Zürich und Center for Security Studies \(CSS\), ETH Zürich](#) (P. 155).

Neutrality Law and notions of neutrality

International law, as codified in the 1907 Hague Conventions²², establishes only a minimal legal core: a neutral state may not take part in a war, must treat belligerents equally, and may not lend its territory or troops to a warring party. Everything outside that core is neutrality policy, which each state defines for itself. The FDFA puts it as follows:²³

- **Neutrality law:** “The law of neutrality is part of international law. It governs how a neutral state must conduct itself towards belligerent states”.
- **Neutrality policy:** “Neutrality policy covers policy decisions and measures that Switzerland takes to ensure that neutrality remains effective and credible, so that it is respected by other states.”
- **Neutrality in practice:** “The Federal Council and Parliament have employed neutrality to protect Switzerland's foreign, security and economic political interests ever since the federal state was established in 1848. This practice of neutrality abides by international law and grants the country the flexibility it needs to safeguard those interests in a range of foreign policy contexts.”

These four approaches to neutrality are the most used in the current Swiss debate. Strict and, in practice, flexible neutrality describe how far a state goes in applying the legal core. Active and cooperative neutrality are largely political framings that describe how the neutral position is used, rather than separate legal categories.²⁴

Strict/Integral neutrality

Strict neutrality, also called integral or permanent neutrality, is the most restrictive reading. The state treats all parties to a conflict equally and abstains from every form of coercive measure, including economic sanctions, unless a sanction is ordered by the UN Security Council. It limits itself to good offices and humanitarian action and keeps a low profile in international organisations. Switzerland practised this integral neutrality from 1938 through the Second World War and the Cold War, after stepping back from sanctions in the League of Nations.²⁵

This is the version the Neutrality Initiative seeks to write into the Federal Constitution: no accession to military alliances, and no participation in non-military coercive measures against other states unless mandated by the UN Security Council. Its appeal is predictability and equal treatment. Its cost is that it removes the government's room to react to new situations and hands effective control over Swiss sanctions decisions to the Security Council, where Russia and China hold a veto.

Active neutrality

²² Abkommen betreffend die Rechte und Pflichten der neutralen Mächte und Personen im Falle eines Landkriegs, [fedlex](#)

²³ Neutrality Initiative, [FDFA](#) (What is the difference between the law of neutrality, neutrality policy and neutrality in practice?).

²⁴ Clarity and guidance on neutrality policy, [National Council](#).

²⁵ Clarity and guidance on neutrality policy, [National Council](#) (Ch. 4.1)

Active neutrality keeps the legal core intact but sees neutrality as a diplomatic tool rather than a reason not to act. The neutral state may offer mediation services, good offices, protecting-power mandates or peace promotion. Active neutrality is based on the understanding that solidarity and engagement are what make neutrality credible.^{26, 27}

Geneva's role as host to the UN, to numerous international organisations and to the International Committee of the Red Cross is the clearest expression of this notion. Under active neutrality, hosting negotiations, running humanitarian operations and representing the interests of states that have broken off relations are seen as the practical foundation for staying neutral in the first place.²⁸

Cooperative neutrality²⁹

Cooperative neutrality is the most recent term, introduced by Federal Councillor and Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis in 2022. Its premise is that in an interconnected world Switzerland can no longer defend its independence and security on its own, and should therefore cooperate selectively with partners such as the EU and NATO's Partnership for Peace on security matters, while keeping the principle of neutrality intact and staying out of military alliances.

Supporters see it as a realistic adaptation to the security situation after 2022. Critics like Lottaz, argue that it is a political repackaging of neutrality rather than a distinct legal category. It sits at the opposite end of the spectrum from strict neutrality.

Differential/Flexible neutrality

Flexible neutrality is the current practice of Switzerland's foreign policy. The government and parliament adapt neutrality to circumstances instead of fixing it in advance.

Switzerland exerts minimal duties under neutrality law but participates in economic sanctions, most recently by adopting the EU sanctions against Russia, while abstaining from military measures. In legal terms this is close to the differential neutrality Switzerland already ran in the League of Nations era between 1920 and 1938, when it joined economic sanctions whilst abstaining from military ones.³⁰

The strength of this notion is adaptability: each situation is assessed on its merits. Its weakness is legal ambiguity, since the line between permitted and prohibited conduct is drawn case by case. This flexibility is reflected in Switzerland's current legal framework, most notably in the Embargo Act, which codifies this case-by-case approach. By contrast, the Neutrality Initiative aims to remove that ambiguity by replacing flexible practice with a single strict definition anchored in the Constitution.³¹

²⁶ Neutrality and Political Good Offices: The case of Switzerland, [Taylor & Francis group](#)

²⁷ Clarity and guidance on neutrality policy, National Council (Ch. 3.1)

²⁸ Clarity and guidance on neutrality policy, National Council (Ch. 3.1)

²⁹ Wanted: politically convenient definition of 'neutrality', [swissinfo](#)

³⁰ Clarity and guidance on neutrality policy, [National Council](#) (p.12-13)

³¹ Federal Act on the Implementation of International Sanctions, [fedlex](#)

Effects of the initiative

Sanctions

Current mechanism: UN sanctions are binding on Switzerland as a member. For all other sanctions, the Embargo Act provides the basis: the Federal Council decides case by case whether to adopt sanctions of the EU, the OSCE or the most important trading partners in full, in part or in adapted form.³² Switzerland thus does not sanction automatically but after weighing its interests. The claim that Switzerland “simply adopts” foreign sanctions does not hold up well: in 2014, for example, it explicitly declined to adopt the EU’s Crimea sanctions and instead only took measures to prevent their circumvention.³³

The veto problem: For years, the P5 states have increasingly blocked each other in the Security Council, which is why sanctions are increasingly decided outside the UN.³⁴ Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine is the extreme case of this: as a permanent Security Council member, Russia’s veto power makes UN sanctions structurally impossible. Under the initiative, Switzerland would not have been allowed to adopt any sanctions in 2022. In cases like this, the decision on whether Switzerland may act at all would effectively lie with the veto powers.

The circumvention clause: The initiative permits “measures to prevent the circumvention of non-military coercive measures of other states.” The Federal Council’s dispatch flags several unresolved interpretive questions around this clause. It is unclear whether measures against individuals and non-state actors would remain possible under the term “belligerent states,” and separately, whether the exception for preventing circumvention of “other states” sanctions would extend to organisations such as the EU or the OSCE.³⁵ The dispatch also points to a practical dilemma: because modern sanctions regimes, such as the EU’s regime against Russia, are extensive and complex, effectively preventing their circumvention would require Switzerland’s own measures to be similarly extensive, in the dispatch’s words a “Herkulesaufgabe” (Herculean task).³⁶ Anything less risks turning Switzerland into a route for circumvention deals, with the diplomatic and economic costs that would bring.

Economic exposure: As a globally interconnected financial centre and one of the world’s most important commodity-trading hubs, Switzerland is particularly exposed: the State Secretariat for International Finance estimated that in January 2022 between 50% and 70% of Russian oil exports were traded by companies that also have operations in Switzerland. (The frequently quoted figure of “80% of Russian commodity trade” is explicitly not confirmed by the Confederation: it goes back to a 2013 report resting on

³² Federal Act on the Implementation of International Sanctions, [fedlex](#)

³³ Ukraine: Measures to prevent the circumvention of international sanctions, [FDFA](#)

³⁴ Neutrality initiative, [FDFA](#) (When and why does Switzerland adopt sanctions? What form do they take?)

³⁵ Botschaft zur Volksinitiative «Wahrung der schweizerischen Neutralität (Neutralitätsinitiative)», [Fedlex](#) (Section 3.3.3, not available in English)

³⁶ Botschaft zur Volksinitiative «Wahrung der schweizerischen Neutralität (Neutralitätsinitiative)», [Fedlex](#) (Section 4.3.2, not available in English)

outdated estimates.).³⁷ If Switzerland were perceived as a circumvention platform, countermeasures from its most important trading partners would loom, chiefly the EU as by far its largest trading partner, but also the USA, whose secondary sanctions reach beyond its own borders to affect banks and companies elsewhere. These risks cannot be precisely quantified, but the dispatch and business associations both classify them as substantial.³⁸ The Federal Council adds a further, more specific risk in the same category: a stricter neutrality could undermine confidence in the reliability of Swiss arms manufacturers as export partners, since a country that only cooperates with security partners in the event of an actual attack is a harder partner to plan around.³⁹

Public opinion: The initiative is often framed as correcting a government that has drifted from the population's wishes. Current polling does not support that framing: as of January 2026, 71% of voters believe it is right for Switzerland to support the sanctions against Russia, and 64% consider the sanctions compatible with Swiss neutrality. A minority of 38% believes the sanctions have cost Switzerland its ability to offer good offices, a view that has not grown since the sanctions were first adopted.⁴⁰

Good Offices ("Gute Dienste") and the Swiss Mediator Role

Definition "Good Offices" & "protecting power": Convention for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes" (Hague I, 29 July 1899) granted neutral powers the right to offer their "Good offices" (= Gute Dienste) without compromising their neutrality obligations.⁴¹ The term denotes services a state provides to help other states talk to each other: hosting negotiations, passing messages, or lending its territory and diplomats for a conference. A "protecting power" is a narrower, older role.⁴² When two countries break off diplomatic relations, for example after a war, a third country can agree to represent one country's interests inside the other's territory, helping its citizens with passports or emergencies. Switzerland currently holds eight such protecting-power mandates (as of Feb. 2026), including representing the United States in Iran since 1980 and Iran in Egypt since 1979.⁴³ This is different from "mediation" in the strict sense, which means actively helping two sides negotiate a deal rather than simply forwarding letters between them.

What makes a mediator trusted: There are two views in the literature on what makes a third country trusted enough to help settle a dispute.

³⁷ Commodity trading with Russia, [Public Eye](#); Russia-Ukraine measures, [SIF](#)

³⁸ Botschaft zur Volksinitiative «Wahrung der schweizerischen Neutralität (Neutralitätsinitiative)», [Fedlex](#) (Section 4.2.2.4. not available in English)

³⁹ Neutrality initiative, [FDFA](#) (Why would stricter neutrality pose a risk to the Swiss defence industry?)

⁴⁰ Sicherheit 2026, [Militärakademie \(MILAK\) an der ETH Zürich und Center for Security Studies \(CSS\), ETH Zürich](#) (P. 168).

⁴¹ Jorio, Die Schweiz und ihre Neutralität, p. 194.

⁴² On the notion of "protecting power" in a historical context, see Hartmann, Ulrike, Prekäre koloniale Ordnung. Rassistische Konjunkturen im Widerspruch. Deutsches Kolonialreich 1884-1914, Bielefeld 2016.

⁴³ Good offices, [FDFA](#)

The older view says impartiality matters most: a country seen as fair to both sides is more likely to be accepted as a host and less likely to be suspected of favouring one party. This fits the traditional image of Switzerland or the Red Cross, welcome in the room precisely because it has no stake in the outcome.

The competing view, developed by the political scientist Saadia Touval, argues the opposite is often true.⁴⁴ Studying decades of Middle East diplomacy, Touval found that countries in conflict frequently prefer a mediator that is not neutral, because they hope it has enough influence over "its" side to make a deal hold. A purely neutral country has no way to make either side keep its promises; a country with a stake in the outcome sometimes does. Andrew Kydd sharpened this into a simple piece of logic: a mediator that wants peace above all has reason to tell both sides a reassuring story just to get them talking, so neither side has much cause to believe it, while a mediator known to lean toward one side has no such incentive when speaking to that side, which is why its warnings are often believed more.⁴⁵

More generally speaking, acceptability as an intermediary is granted by the conflict parties based on their interests, not earned by constitutional text. Russia negotiated the Black Sea grain deal and repeated prisoner exchanges through Türkiye, a NATO member that supplies combat drones to Ukraine.⁴⁶ If sanctions as such disqualified an intermediary, none of this would have happened. Moscow's rejection of Switzerland was a decision about Switzerland's usefulness to Moscow at that moment, not the application of a fixed neutrality test that a constitutional article could pass. Also, the wider record shows that major settlements were mostly closed by mediators with a stake and with leverage. At Camp David, the United States mediated between Egypt and Israel while being Israel's closest ally.⁴⁷ The Dayton Accords ending the Bosnian war were negotiated by the US weeks after NATO had bombed one of the parties.⁴⁸ This matches the finding from the mediation literature above: parties want a mediator that is useful to them, and usefulness comes from access and leverage at least as much as from abstention.

Swiss reporting reaches the same conclusion: non-neutral states such as Türkiye, Qatar and the USA increasingly compete with Switzerland in mediation, which suggests that neutrality helps the good offices but is not a precondition for them.⁴⁹

What the initiative would change: Switzerland offers its good offices and mediation wherever possible today, and paragraph 4 adds no capability it lacks. What the initiative removes is the case-by-case choice that current law provides. Under the Embargo Act, the Federal Council weighs each conflict on its own: in 2014 it declined to adopt the EU's Crimea sanctions and limited itself to preventing their circumvention⁵⁰, in 2022 it decided the opposite way.⁵¹ Removing the sanctions option therefore does not make Switzerland more neutral than it can already choose to be. It takes away one of the few instruments a

⁴⁴ Introduction Bias, Prenegotiation and Leverage in Mediation, [Zartman](#)

⁴⁵ Which Side Are You On? Bias, Credibility, and Mediation, [Andrew Kydd](#)

⁴⁶ What Role Can Turkey Play in Ukraine Negotiations?, [CSIS](#)

⁴⁷ Jimmy Carter and the United States in the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, [Yale](#)

⁴⁸ Diplomacy Ends a War: The Dayton Accords, [National Museum of American Diplomacy](#)

⁴⁹ Nicht neutrale Staaten machen der Schweiz bei der Vermittlung Konkurrenz, [NZZ](#)

⁵⁰ Ukraine: Measures to prevent the circumvention of international sanctions, [FDFA](#)

⁵¹ Switzerland adopts EU sanctions against Russia, [Federal Council](#)

non-aligned state has to respond to breaches of international law, and hands the decision on whether Switzerland may respond at all to the UN Security Council, where the aggressor of 2022 holds a veto. There is also a reputational risk in the opposite direction to the one the committee fears: a state that can never react to anything, including wars of aggression and large-scale human rights violations, risks being read not as principled but as indifferent. Condemning such violations is not a matter of choosing a side in someone else's war. It is a matter of defending the international rules on which a small, unaligned country depends more than most.

Cooperation with military and defensive alliances

The adoption of the Neutrality Initiative would restrict cooperation with military and defensive alliances to when a direct attack against Switzerland, or the preparation of such an attack, was underway.

In the current European panorama of military and defensive alliances, the adoption of the Initiative would stop any cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). If any new regional alliances were to be created in the future, the adoption of the Initiative would prevent Switzerland from assessing whether cooperation with them would be relevant and beneficial to Swiss foreign policy and military interests, but rather ban any cooperation *tout court*.

Switzerland's cooperation with NATO is long-standing, dating back to its joining of the Partnership for Peace (PfP)⁵² in 1996. Under this framework, participation is voluntary and self-directed: while Switzerland autonomously defines its security priorities and boundaries in line with its neutrality, the resulting Individually Tailored Partnership Programme (ITPP)⁵³ is jointly negotiated and agreed upon between Switzerland and NATO.⁵⁴

Promoting Swiss foreign policy priorities: Leveraging Swiss expertise and knowledge, notably through the three Geneva centres (Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP)⁵⁵, Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)⁵⁶, and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF)⁵⁷), Switzerland trains partners on human rights and women's rights, on the rule of law and international (humanitarian) law, and on the democratic governance of armed forces and law enforcement. Additionally, Switzerland funds specific long-term projects, on demining for instance, on a case-by-case basis.⁵⁸

⁵² NATO: Partnership for Peace, [FDFA](#)

⁵³ Individually Tailored Partnership Programmes, [NATO](#)

⁵⁴ Emphases and activities: an overview of the most important topics and projects by which Switzerland is contributing to the Partnership for Peace programme, [DDPS and FDFA](#)

⁵⁵ About us, [GCSP](#)

⁵⁶ About us, [GICHD](#)

⁵⁷ About, [DCAF](#)

⁵⁸ Emphases and activities: an overview of the most important topics and projects by which Switzerland is contributing to the Partnership for Peace programme, [DDPS and FDFA](#)

These engagements allow Swiss values and foreign policy priorities to be promoted in partner countries.⁵⁹

Peace operations: Swiss army deployments abroad to maintain peace are very limited in both scope and numbers. The largest peacekeeping deployment to date is SWISSCOY.⁶⁰ Set up in 1999 and composed of up to 300 members^{61, 62} of the Swiss Armed Forces, SWISSCOY is deployed in Kosovo in support of the NATO-led mission Kosovo Force (KFOR).^{63, 64} The security situation in Kosovo has largely improved thanks to the work of KFOR and of the EU mediation to normalize relations between Serbia and Kosovo. Yet, flare ups of the conflict cannot be ruled out (see for instance the clashes that took place in 2023 in the Northern part of the country⁶⁵). A continued presence of KFOR is, therefore, still needed. While under a United Nations Security Council mandate (S/RES/1244 (1999)⁶⁶), KFOR is led by NATO. The adoption of the Initiative would not forbid Swiss cooperation with NATO directly, but most likely lead to it as a political consequence and with that also to the end of Swiss peacekeeping operations in Kosovo altogether.

Cyber defence: In 2025, the Federal Office for Cybersecurity received 222 mandatory reports on cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructure in Switzerland.⁶⁷ This reporting duty has only been in force since 1 April 2025, so the figure is not comparable with earlier years. The Swiss Armed Forces established a Cyber Command in 2024,⁶⁸ in line with the Federal Council's Vision 2030,⁶⁹ to enhance the country's cyberdefence capabilities. The Cyber Command, and the Swiss Armed Forces generally, cooperate with NATO on a case-by-case basis.^{70 71} Cooperation mainly takes the form of joint training exercises, such as the Cyber Coalition⁷² or the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence⁷³, to

⁵⁹ A comprehensive approach to security: The Security Policy Strategy of Switzerland 2026 – In brief, [SEPOS](#) (Section: 6)

⁶⁰ Western Balkans: Swiss military peace support, [Center for Security Studies \(CSS\), ETH Zürich](#) (section: Security Policy Milestone)

⁶¹ Switzerland approves additional forces for Kosovo peacekeeping mission, [Swissinfo](#)

⁶² Schweizer Beteiligung an der KFOR. Verlängerung des Swissscoy-Einsatzes | Participation de la Suisse à la KFOR. Prolongation de l'engagement de la Swissscoy, [Swiss Parliament](#) (not available in English)

⁶³ Missions, [SWISSINT](#) (Section: SWISSCOY | KFOR)

⁶⁴ SWISSCOY KFOR, [DDPS](#)

⁶⁵ Northern Kosovo clashes, [Wikipedia](#)

⁶⁶ Resolution 1244 (1999) / adopted by the Security Council at its 4011th meeting, on 10 June 1999, [United Nations](#) (Articles 5, 7, 8, and 9)

⁶⁷ Annual report NCSC 2025, [National Cyber Security Centre \(NCSC\)](#)

⁶⁸ Création du commandement Cyber, [DDPS](#) (not available in English)

⁶⁹ Vision 2030, [DDPS](#) (not available in English)

⁷⁰ Cyber defence, [NATO](#) (Section: Cooperating with partners)

⁷¹ A comprehensive approach to security: The Security Policy Strategy of Switzerland 2026 – In brief, [SEPOS](#) (Section: 9)

⁷² Cyber Coalition: NATO's Flagship Cyber Exercise, [NATO](#)

⁷³ About us, [NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence \(CCDCOE\)](#)

scale up best practices and identify capability gaps. The adoption of the Initiative would bar cooperation with NATO in this domain and potentially increase the risk of cyberattacks targeting Switzerland.

Defence in cooperation: One of the pillars of the Swiss security strategy is “Defence in cooperation”.⁷⁴ The idea is that Switzerland can count on its partners in the event of an armed attack. A key prerequisite is interoperability, or the ability of different military systems to work together.⁷⁵ Interoperability is built around systems and equipment that can operate together coherently (technical interoperability), common doctrines, procedures and terminology (procedural interoperability), and mutual trust and understanding (human interoperability).^{76 77 78} Interoperability is not, however, built at the snap of a finger, but rather through years of mutual cooperation and understanding that eventually result in interoperable systems that effectively defend Switzerland. The adoption of the Initiative would bar Switzerland from conducting this painstaking work that slowly, over time, strengthens our defence capabilities.

The Federal Council's own dispatch on the Initiative makes the same point in stronger terms (translated): "Should concrete signs of preparations for a military attack emerge, it is likely to be too late to seek cooperation with relevant alliances, as such cooperation requires time and preparation."⁷⁹ It adds that for the entire period before an attack, Switzerland would be excluded from cooperation with military alliances altogether meaning Switzerland could miss warning signs of an attack being prepared against it. The dispatch concludes that a security-policy go-it-alone approach, forgoing international defence cooperation, is not a viable course of action.⁸⁰

Public opinion:⁸¹ As of January 2026, 56% of the population supports closer Swiss cooperation with NATO, well above the pre-2022 average, and a third of voters (32%, all time high) would go further and support a NATO membership. 38%, an all time low, believe that Switzerland should solely rely on its own national defense. Even less, 32%, believe that Switzerland shall steer clear of alliances and partnerships of any kind with other states. For the first time, the same survey also asked whether the armed forces' foreign missions contribute to Swiss security at all, 50% agreed, 41% disagreed, 9% undecided).

⁷⁴ The Security Policy Strategy of Switzerland 2026: For comprehensive security, [SEPOS](#) (Section: 10)

⁷⁵ Military interoperability: considerations for small states, [Vernon Noel Bennett](#) (Section: Military interoperability as a construct)

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ NATO Standard AJP-01, [NATO](#) (Page 71)

⁷⁸ The Security Policy Strategy of Switzerland 2026: For comprehensive security, [SEPOS](#) (Section: 10)

⁷⁹ Botschaft zur Volksinitiative «Wahrung der schweizerischen Neutralität (Neutralitätsinitiative)», [Fedlex](#) (Section 4.2.2.3, not available in English)

⁸⁰ Botschaft zur Volksinitiative «Wahrung der schweizerischen Neutralität (Neutralitätsinitiative)», [Fedlex](#) (Section 4.2.2.3, not available in English)

⁸¹ Sicherheit 2026, [Militärakademie \(MILAK\) an der ETH Zürich und Center for Security Studies \(CSS\), ETH Zürich](#) (P. 129-135).

In summary: Currently, Switzerland's cooperation with NATO is entirely on Switzerland's terms. It is voluntary and limited to domains that are of importance for Swiss foreign policy and military security. This cooperation fully respects Switzerland's neutrality. The adoption of the Initiative would bar Switzerland from cooperating with NATO altogether, with consequences on Swiss defence capabilities, notably on cyber defence, and on Swiss foreign policy, namely on the promotion of democratic governance and international law.

Case study: Sweden

On a rainy Brussels day in March 2024, the flag of Sweden was raised in front of the headquarters of NATO symbolically marking the country's accession to the alliance and the end to 200 years of Swedish neutrality.^{82 83} Throughout this time period, Swedish neutrality was always flexible and pragmatic and its practice changed as international events unfolded.

The birth of neutrality: The policy of neutrality was initiated in the 1810s by King Charles XIV John. A French field marshal named Jean Baptiste Bernadotte, he was designated as heir since King Charles XIII had no children who could inherit the throne.⁸⁴ King Charles XIV John acted pragmatically in the context of the Napoleonic Wars: he negotiated Swedish control over Norway (then a Danish subject and ally of Napoleonic France) for Russian control over Finland. While this agreement disappointed some Swedes, who saw it as a capitulation of Sweden's rightful lands in Finland to the historic enemy, Russia, it provided a secure position to declare that Sweden should stay out of great power conflicts.⁸⁵ This policy was formalized in 1834, with the declaration of neutrality. Successive kings adhered to the concept of neutrality, but kept it flexible "in order not to provoke potential enemies".⁸⁶

Flexible neutrality to avoid war in Sweden: Sweden's neutrality adapted with the international context of the 20th century. During World War I, Sweden observed a stricter neutrality and traded with both the Central Powers and the Entente.⁸⁷ The Entente, however, saw Swedish demands to trade freely as benefitting Germany and ended most trade with the country, leading to a food shortage in 1916 and a compromise in 1918, whereby Sweden would have access to trade with the Entente but it would limit trade with Germany and put its merchant fleet at the Entente's disposal.⁸⁸ During the interwar period, Sweden fully engaged in the League of Nations. It resonated with its values of multilateralism and internationalism, attempting to promote peace and humanitarianism diplomatically.⁸⁹ During World War II, Sweden declared its neutrality. This did not prevent the government, however, from providing material support and allowing volunteers to assist Finland in its defence against the invasion of the country by the USSR.⁹⁰ Following the invasion of Norway and Denmark by Nazi Germany, Sweden was forced to allow

⁸² NATO marks Sweden's entry with flag raising ceremony, [DW](#)

⁸³ Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the Accession of the Kingdom of Sweden, [US Department of State](#)

⁸⁴ Bernadotte of Sweden, [Encyclopedia Britannica](#)

⁸⁵ Sweden's Policy of Neutrality: Success Through Flexibility?, [Brommesson, Ekengren & Michalski](#) in Successful Public Policy in the Nordic Countries: Cases, Lessons, Challenges, [de la Porte \(ed.\) et al.](#) (Section: The Birth of Swedish Neutrality)

⁸⁶ Sweden's Policy of Neutrality: Success Through Flexibility?, [Brommesson, Ekengren & Michalski](#) in Successful Public Policy in the Nordic Countries: Cases, Lessons, Challenges, [de la Porte \(ed.\) et al.](#) (Section: The Birth of Swedish Neutrality)

⁸⁷ Policy during World War I, [Encyclopedia Britannica](#)

⁸⁸ Policy during World War I, [Encyclopedia Britannica](#)

⁸⁹ Sweden's Policy of Neutrality: Success Through Flexibility?, [Brommesson, Ekengren & Michalski](#) in Successful Public Policy in the Nordic Countries: Cases, Lessons, Challenges, [de la Porte \(ed.\) et al.](#) (Section: The Evolution of Institutionalized Neutrality: Four Snapshots)

⁹⁰ Swedish intervention in the Winter War, [Wikipedia](#)

German troops to move within its territory to reach Norway and Finland.⁹¹ Sweden, as a neutral country, served as refuge for Norwegians, Danes and Finns, including half of Norway's and all of Denmark's Jewish population.⁹²

Adapting neutrality to the new realities of the post-WWII world: At the end of World War II, Sweden maintained a policy of strict neutrality.^{93, 94} Yet, as international tension mounted during the Berlin blockade (1948-1949), Sweden took the lead in negotiating a Scandinavian Defence Union with Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland. Disagreement on whether the alliance would be independent (Sweden's position) or cooperate with the West (Norway's position) ultimately led to the collapse of the talks.^{95, 96} Norway, Denmark and Iceland subsequently joined NATO, while Sweden and Finland kept neutral. Successive Prime Ministers believed that a passive foreign policy, where Sweden did not express strong views on sensitive issues on the international stage, would better serve the interests of the country and increase its credibility internationally.⁹⁷

A more active role on the world stage: This began to change in the late 1960s, as a new generation of leaders starting with Olof Palme took a more active view of neutrality, where Sweden would speak up on moral grounds. Palme and the following Prime Ministers criticized the United States and the USSR when they broke international law, most notably in Vietnam and Afghanistan respectively, and adopted anti-colonialist, anti-apartheid positions.^{98 99}

With the fall of the USSR and an economic recession hitting the country, Swedes approved by referendum the country's accession to the European Union in 1995.¹⁰⁰ In this context, Sweden's neutrality shifted again: the country sought an active role in shaping the EU's foreign and defence policy to build capacity for peacekeeping, peace building and other non-military interventions abroad.¹⁰¹ In addition, it started to cooperate more closely with NATO by joining the Partnership for Peace in 1996.¹⁰² The Swedish Armed Forces defence capabilities were downgraded as the country's foreign policy focused more on fostering democracy, rule of law and human rights abroad with EU and NATO partners (Sweden

⁹¹ Foreign policy (1918–45), [Encyclopedia Britannica](#)

⁹² Humanitarian effort, [Wikipedia](#), in Sweden during World War II

⁹³ Sweden's Policy of Neutrality: Success Through Flexibility?, [Brommesson, Ekengren & Michalski](#) in Successful Public Policy in the Nordic Countries: Cases, Lessons, Challenges, [de la Porte \(ed.\) et al.](#) (Section: The Evolution of Institutionalized Neutrality: Four Snapshots)

⁹⁴ Swedish foreign policy into the 1990s, [Encyclopedia Britannica](#)

⁹⁵ Scandinavian defence union, [Wikipedia](#)

⁹⁶ Swedish foreign policy into the 1990s, [Encyclopedia Britannica](#)

⁹⁷ Sweden's Policy of Neutrality: Success Through Flexibility?, [Brommesson, Ekengren & Michalski](#) in Successful Public Policy in the Nordic Countries: Cases, Lessons, Challenges, [de la Porte \(ed.\) et al.](#) (Section: The Evolution of Institutionalized Neutrality: Four Snapshots)

⁹⁸ FOREIGN POLICY POSITIONS OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER OLOF PALME, [CIA](#)

⁹⁹ Sweden's Policy of Neutrality: Success Through Flexibility?, [Brommesson, Ekengren & Michalski](#) in Successful Public Policy in the Nordic Countries: Cases, Lessons, Challenges, [de la Porte \(ed.\) et al.](#) (Section: The Evolution of Institutionalized Neutrality: Four Snapshots)

¹⁰⁰ Domestic affairs through the 1990s, [Encyclopedia Britannica](#)

¹⁰¹ Sweden's Policy of Neutrality: Success Through Flexibility?, [Brommesson, Ekengren & Michalski](#) in Successful Public Policy in the Nordic Countries: Cases, Lessons, Challenges, [de la Porte \(ed.\) et al.](#) (Section: The Evolution of Institutionalized Neutrality: Four Snapshots)

¹⁰² Relations with Sweden, [NATO](#)

joined peacekeeping missions in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq¹⁰³).¹⁰⁴ This culminated in 2010, when the country suspended conscription. Then, following the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014 and its support for “separatists” in Ukraine’s eastern regions, Sweden gradually reintroduced it for men and women above the age of 18 from 2014.^{105 106}

The turning point: The turning point for Swedish neutrality, however, would come on 24 February 2022. At around 3:30 EET, Russian military forces launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.¹⁰⁷ Sweden’s military and civil support to Ukraine since the invasion has been key in ensuring the country’s resistance.¹⁰⁸

Sweden and Finland, the two neutral non-aligned Nordic countries, had a reckoning. The degradation of the security situation in Europe started a debate, in both countries, around their defence policies and whether NATO membership was the best strategic choice. In Sweden, a seismic policy shift took place as the three largest political parties, the Sweden Democrats (who underscored the conditionality of their support on Finland also joining), the Social Democratic Party (historically opposed to NATO membership) and the Moderates (historically in favour of NATO membership), endorsed Swedish membership in NATO.^{109 110 111} This was a reflection of the seismic shift in Swedish public opinion on NATO membership: in early 2022, ~40% of Swedes were in favour and ~35% were against it. By May 2022, ~60% were in favour and ~20% against.^{112 113} Sweden and Finland held a series of high-level talks and submitted their applications to join NATO together in May 2022.¹¹⁴ After Finland’s accession to the alliance in April 2023, support for Swedish membership in Sweden hovered around 60%, while opposition was below 20%.¹¹⁵ Sweden finally acceded to NATO in March 2024, when its flag was symbolically raised at NATO headquarters on a rainy Brussels day, thus ending 200 years of neutrality.¹¹⁶

In summary: Flexibility has been a centre pillar of Sweden’s policy of neutrality. The country has sometimes remained passive and retreated from the world stage (post-WWII era), while at other times it fully engaged internationally, both diplomatically (in the interwar era at the League of Nations, for instance) and militarily (in the post-Cold War era with NATO cooperation, for example). The idea of neutrality in Sweden has consistently

¹⁰³ Relations with Sweden, [NATO](#)

¹⁰⁴ Sweden’s Policy of Neutrality: Success Through Flexibility?, [Brommesson, Ekengren & Michalski](#) in Successful Public Policy in the Nordic Countries: Cases, Lessons, Challenges, [de la Porte \(ed.\) et al.](#) (Section: The Evolution of Institutionalized Neutrality: Four Snapshots)

¹⁰⁵ In English, [Plikt- och prövningsverket \(Swedish Defence Conscription and Assessment Agency\)](#)

¹⁰⁶ Conscription, [Swedish Armed Forces](#)

¹⁰⁷ 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, [Wikipedia](#)

¹⁰⁸ Sweden's support to Ukraine, [Government Offices of Sweden](#)

¹⁰⁹ Politikk - NATO, [Moderaterna](#) (not available in English)

¹¹⁰ SD svänger om Nato: ”Vi behöver gå hand i hand med Finland”, [SVT news](#) (not available in English)

¹¹¹ Socialdemokraterna vill att Sverige ska ansöka om medlemskap i Nato, [Socialdemokraterna](#) (not available in English)

¹¹² Totals do not equal 100% because of undecided

¹¹³ Sweden-NATO relations, [Wikipedia](#) (Section: Polls on Swedish membership of NATO)

¹¹⁴ Finland and Sweden submit applications to join NATO, [NATO](#)

¹¹⁵ Sweden-NATO relations, [Wikipedia](#) (Section: Polls on Swedish membership of NATO)

¹¹⁶ NATO marks Sweden's entry with flag raising ceremony, [DW](#)

been interpreted and implemented in a pragmatic way, shaped by the realities of the times, to successfully protect the country's independence and avoid war.

Position of Volt EUR

The initiative runs against several of Volt Europa's core positions.

The clearest conflict is on defence. Volt Europa advocates a European Ministry of Defence, a European Military Headquarters and a standing European Response Force of 60,000 personnel, alongside integrated EU military units established in coordination with NATO.¹¹⁷ It further proposes an EU–NATO Strategic Coordination Group as a permanent political steering body between the two.¹¹⁸ The cooperation ban would bar Switzerland from taking part in any of this outside an actual or imminent attack, and would end the NATO cooperation Switzerland already conducts on its own terms. The same applies to hybrid and cyber threats, where Volt Europa calls for a unified EU doctrine and intelligence sharing.¹¹⁹

The second conflict is on sanctions. Volt Europa's objection to unanimity in the Council is precisely that the current structure allows any single Member State to block crucial legislation, sanctions packages or trade deals,¹²⁰ which is why it proposes qualified majority voting for matters under the Common Foreign and Security Policy, sanctions among them.¹²¹ Its position on the UN Security Council runs the same way: abolish permanent seats and replace unanimity for matters related to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.¹²² The initiative moves in the opposite direction, making every Swiss sanctions decision dependent on the agreement of the five permanent members. Volt Europa also foresees financing Ukrainian reconstruction and accession reforms from assets seized under the Russia sanctions,¹²³ a policy that presupposes such sanctions being adopted in the first place.

Paragraph 4 of the initiative, which commits Switzerland to conflict prevention, resolution and mediation, is compatible with Volt Europa's support for a rules-based multilateral order. As set out above, however, it adds nothing to what Switzerland already does.

¹¹⁷ An autonomous military and civil defence capability, [Volt EUR](#)

¹¹⁸ A European pillar for NATO and an integrated democratic world, [Volt EUR](#)

¹¹⁹ Ensuring a comprehensive strategic deterrent, [Volt EUR](#)

¹²⁰ Volt calls for the abolition of veto power in the European Council, [Volt EUR](#)

¹²¹ Transform the Council of the European Union into the European Senate, [Volt EUR](#)

¹²² Championing a Reformed Multilateral System, [Volt EUR Moonshot Programme](#) (Ch.9)

¹²³ A Vision for a Wider, Stronger and More Inclusive Union, [Volt EUR Moonshot Programme](#) (Ch.3)